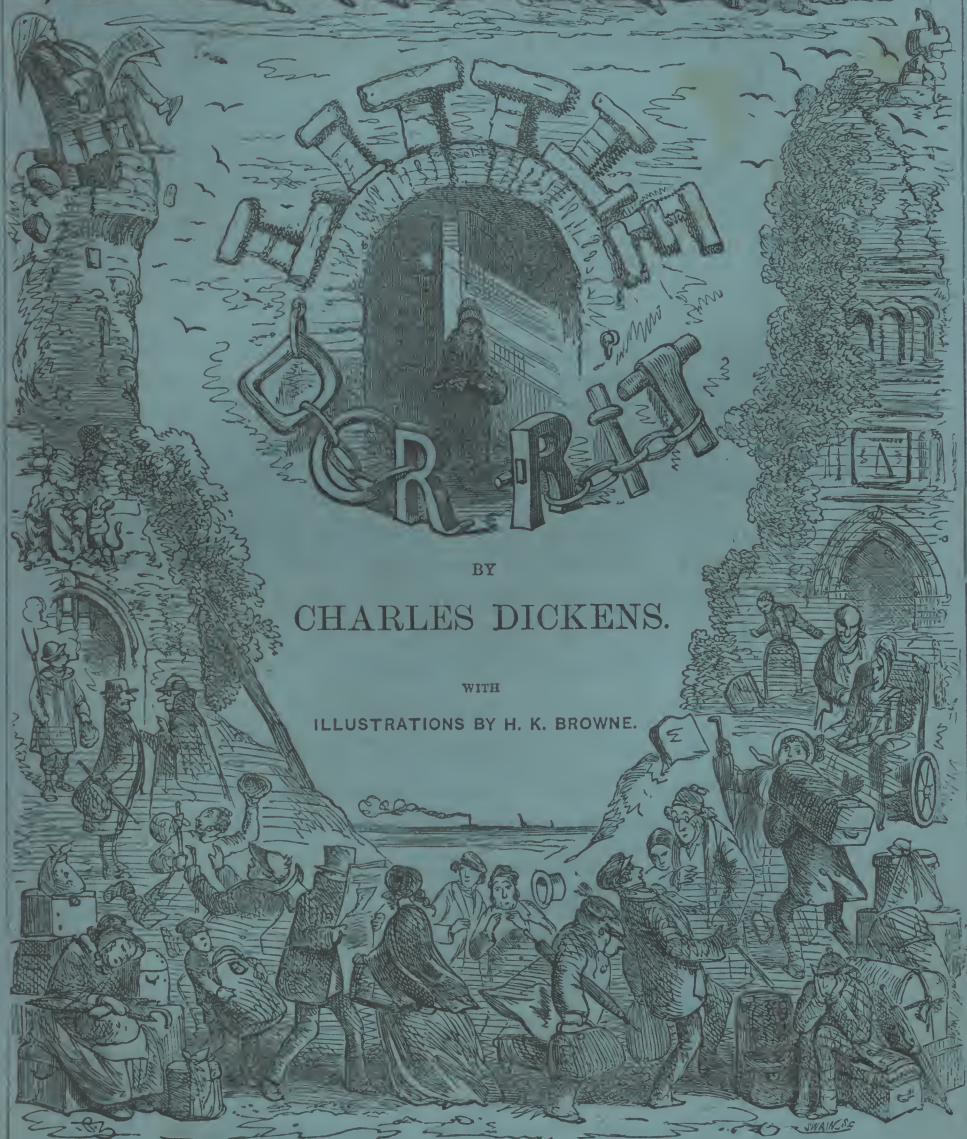


BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. K. BROWNE.



LONDON: BRADBURY & EVANS, BOUVERIE STREET.

AGENTS: J. MENZIES, EDINBURGH; MURRAY AND SON, GLASGOW; J. M'GLASHAN, DUBLIN.

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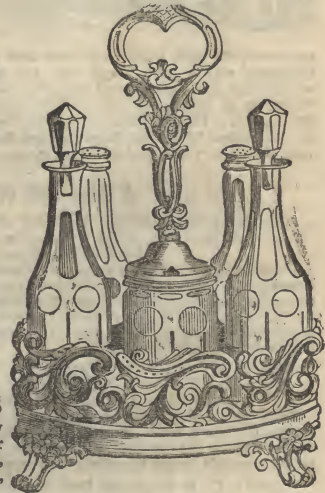


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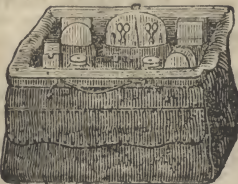
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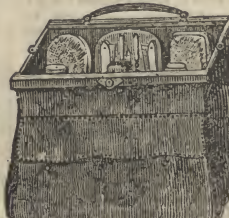
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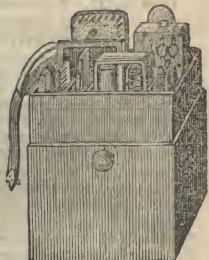
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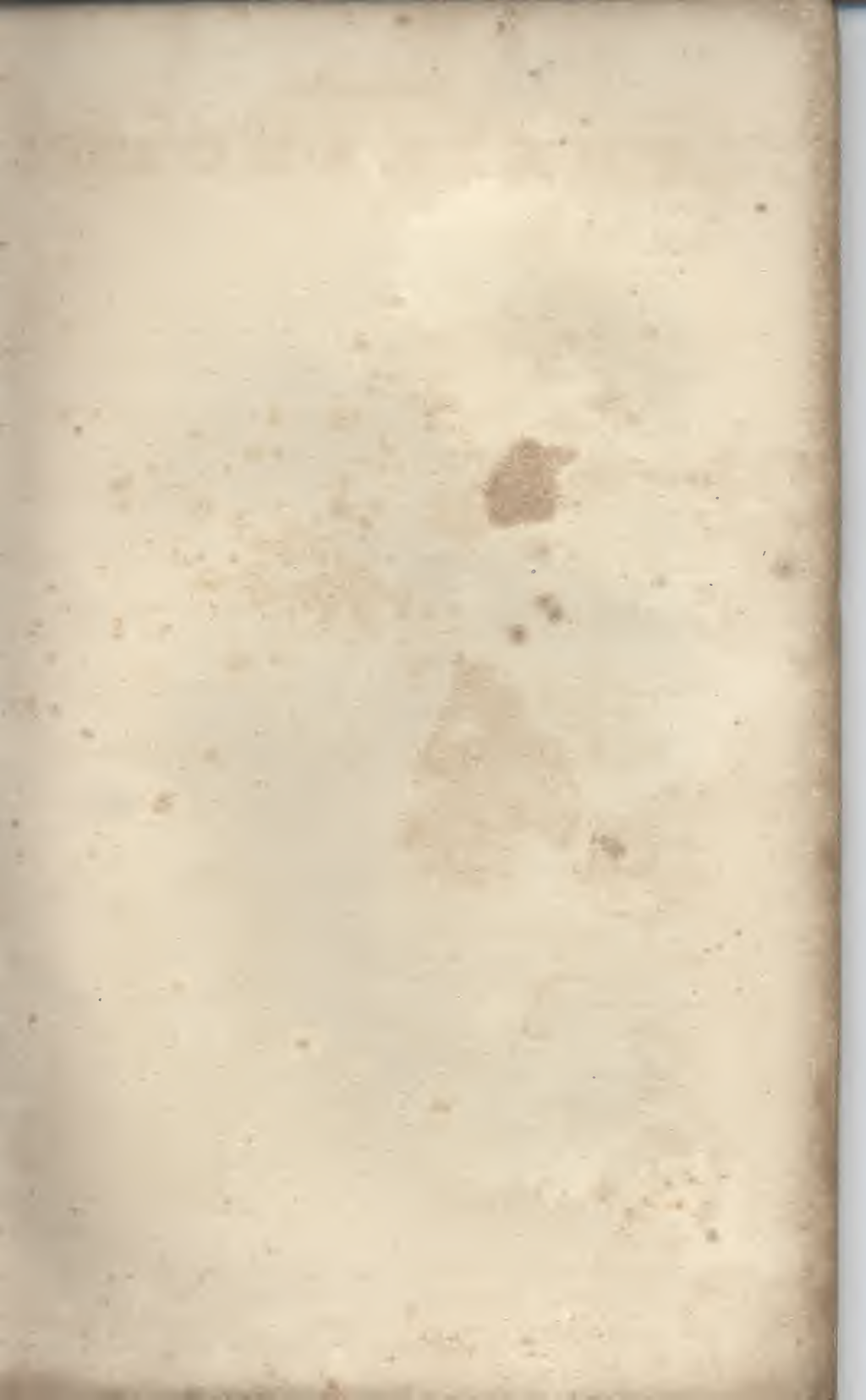
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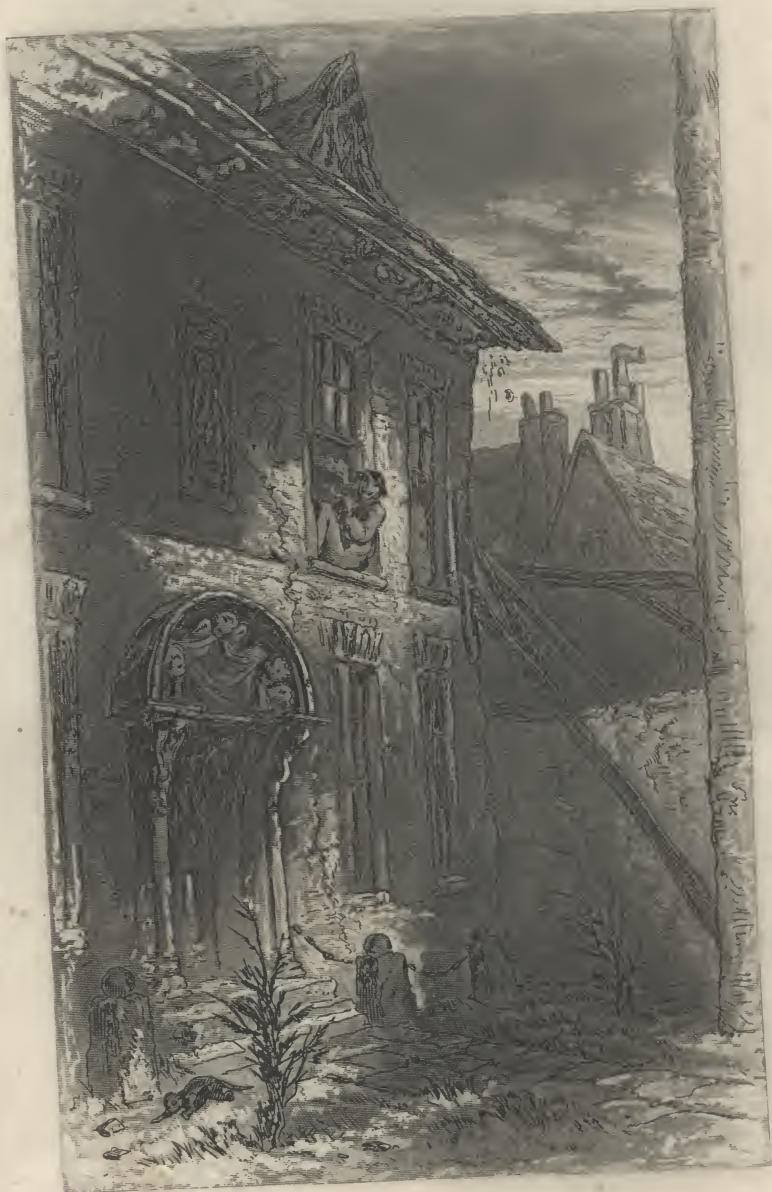
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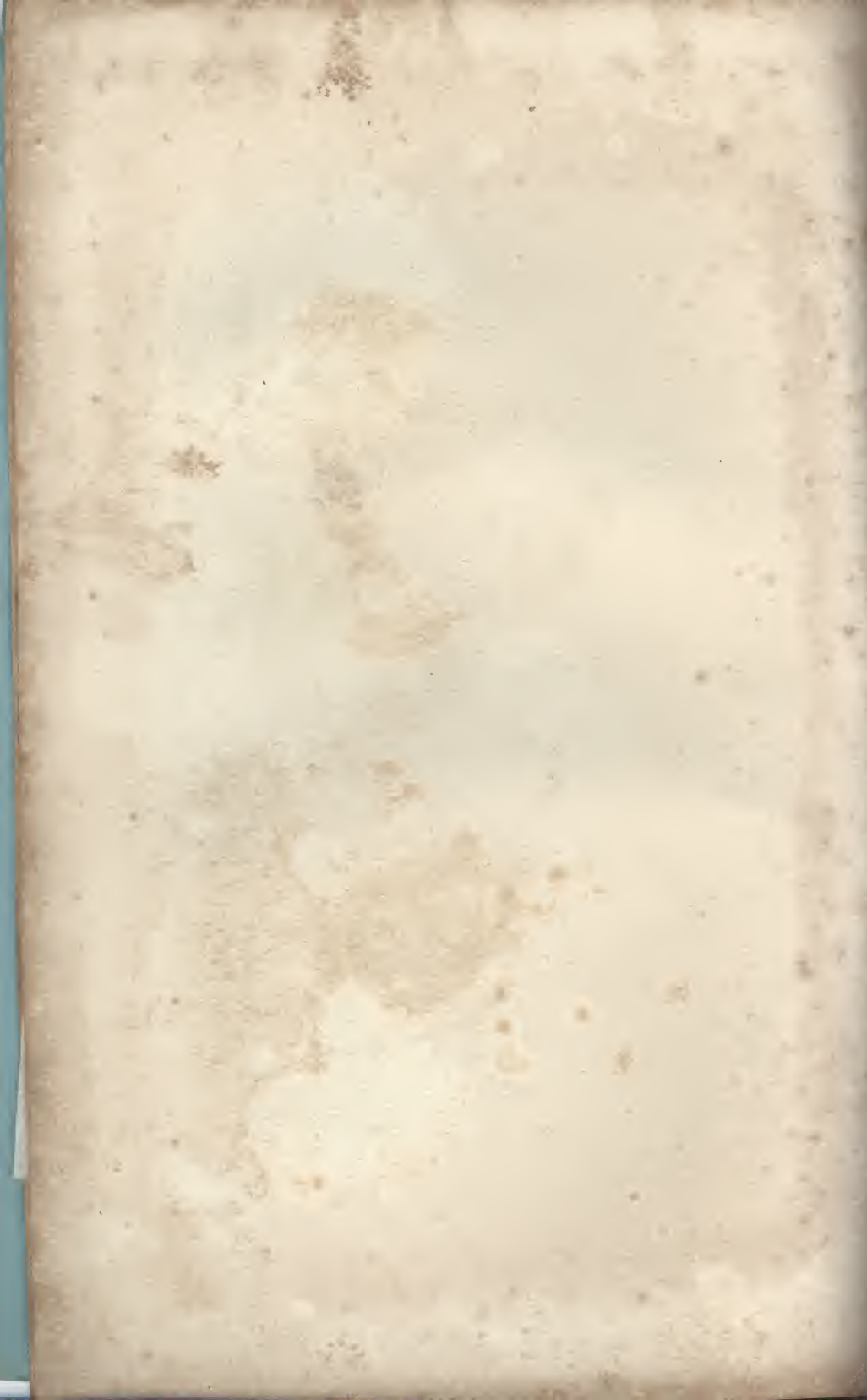


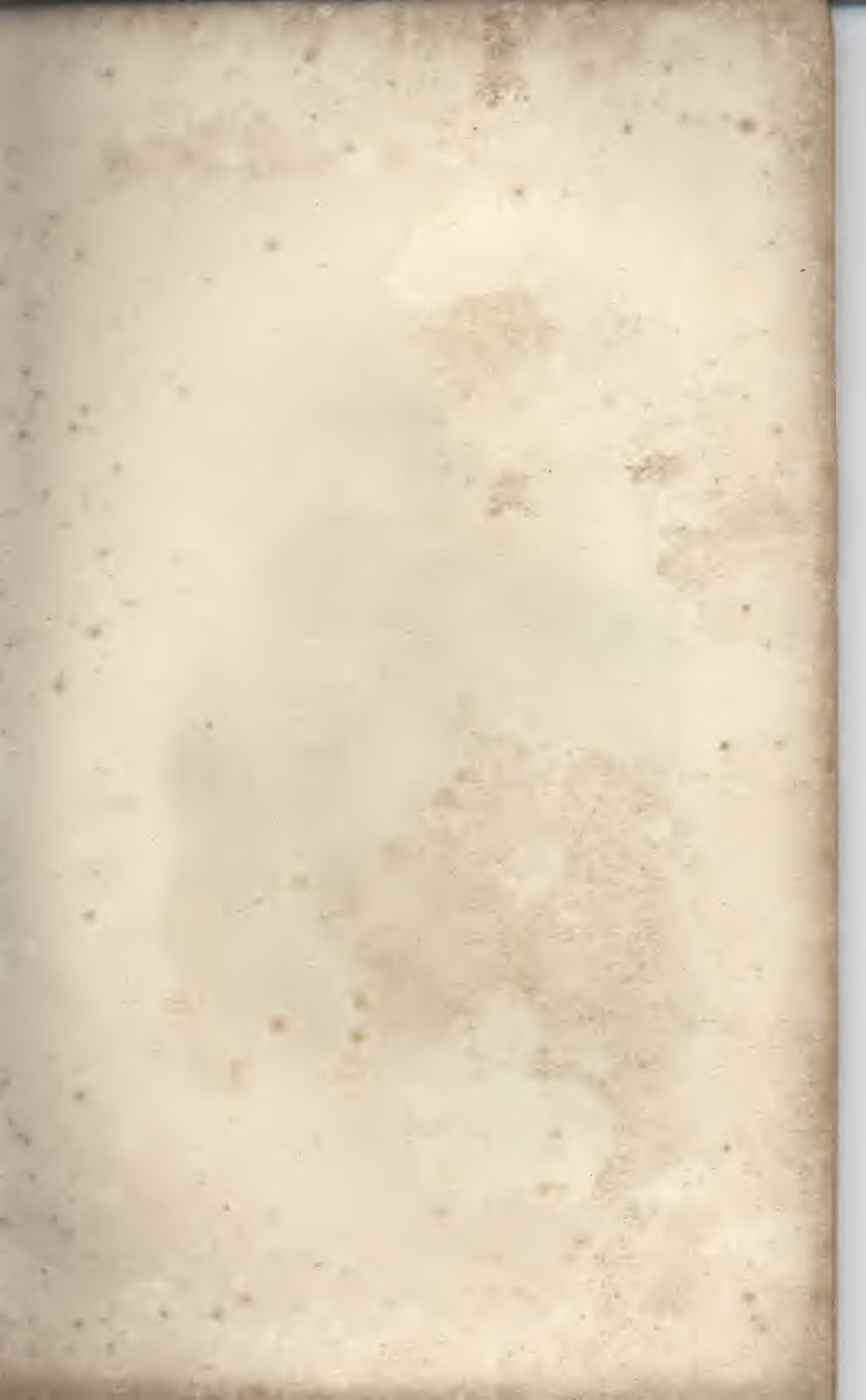


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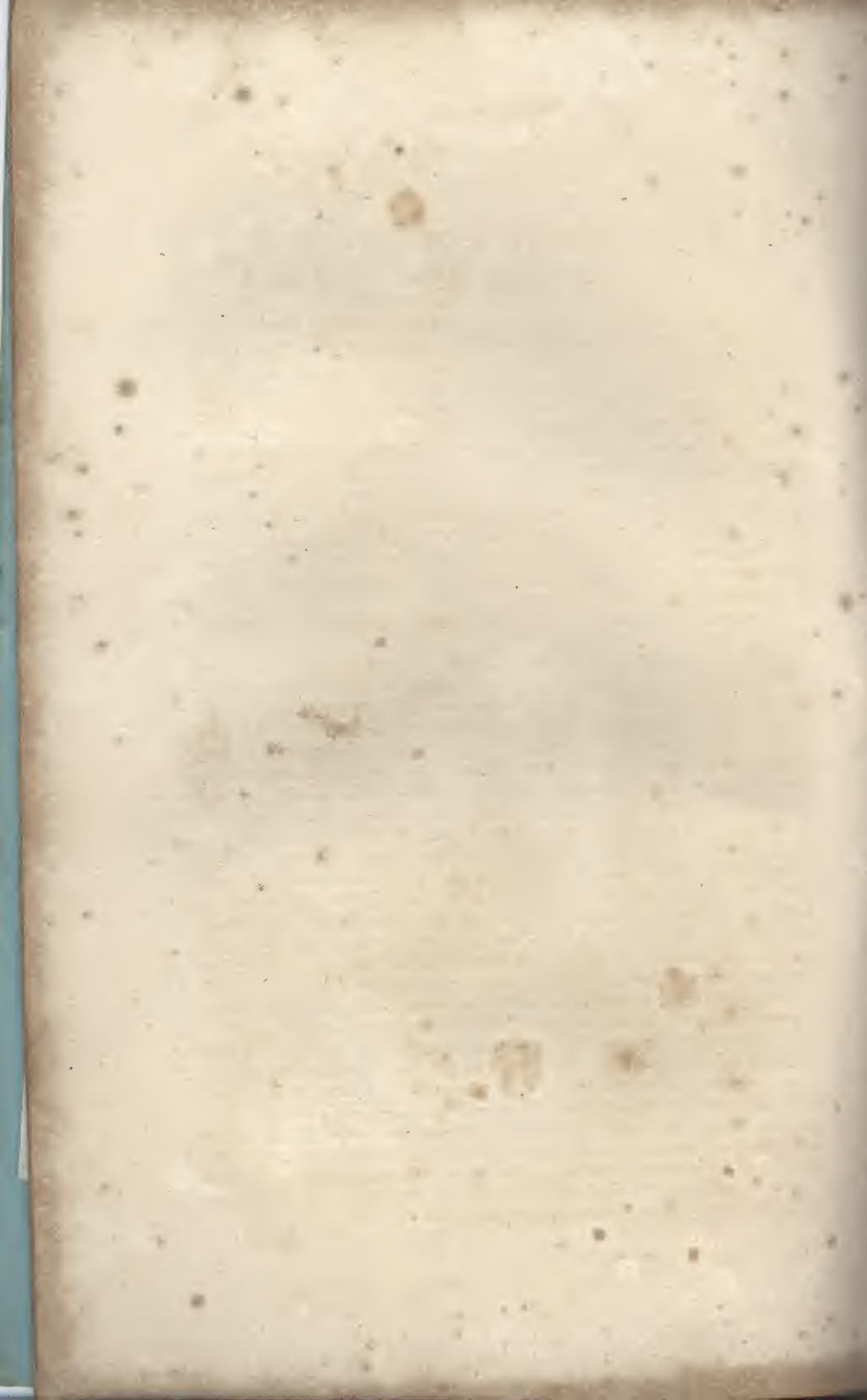
CHARLES DICKENS.



LONDON:

BRADBURY & EVANS, BOUYERIE STREET.

1857.



CHAPTER XXX.

CLOSING IN.

THE last day of the appointed week touched the bars of the Marshalsea gate. Black, all night, since the gate had clashed upon Little Dorrit, its iron stripes were turned by the early-glowing sun into stripes of gold. Far aslant across the city, over its jumbled roofs, and through the open tracery of its church towers, struck the long bright rays, bars of the prison of this lower world.

Throughout the day, the old house within the gateway remained untroubled by any visitors. But, when the sun was low, three men turned in at the gateway and made for the dilapidated house.

Rigaud was the first, and walked by himself, smoking. Mr. Baptist was the second, and jogged close after him, looking at no other object. Mr. Pancks was the third, and carried his hat under his arm for the liberation of his restive hair; the weather being extremely hot. They all came together at the door-steps.

"You pair of madmen!" said Rigaud, facing about. "Don't go yet!"

"We don't mean to," said Mr. Pancks.

Giving him a dark glance in acknowledgement of his answer, Rigaud knocked loudly. He had charged himself with drink for the playing out of his game, and was impatient to begin. He had hardly finished one long resounding knock, when he turned to the knocker again and began another. That was not yet finished, when Jeremiah Flintwinch opened the door, and they all clanked into the stone hall. Rigaud, thrusting Mr. Flintwinch aside, proceeded straight up-stairs. His two attendants followed him, Mr. Flintwinch followed them, and they all came trooping into Mrs. Clennam's quiet room. It was in its usual state; except that one of the windows was wide open, and Affery sat on its old-fashioned window-seat, mending a stocking. The usual articles were on the little table; the usual deadened fire was in the grate; the bed had its usual pall upon it; and the mistress of all sat on her black bier-like sofa, propped up by her black angular bolster that was like the head'sman's block.

Yet there was a nameless air of preparation in the room, as if it were strung up for an occasion. From what the room derived it—every one of its small variety of objects being in the fixed spot it had occupied for years—no one could have said without looking attentively at its mistress, and that, too, with a previous knowledge of her face. Although her unchanging black dress was in every plait precisely as of old, and her unchanging attitude was rigidly preserved, a very slight additional setting of her features and contraction of her gloomy forehead was so powerfully marked, that it marked everything about her.

"Who are these!" she said, wonderingly, as the two attendants entered. "What do these people want here?"

"Who are these, dear madame, is it?" returned Rigaud. "Faith, they are friends of your son the prisoner. And what do they want here, is it? Death, madame, I don't know. You will do well to ask them."

"You know you told us, at the door, not to go yet," said Pancks.

"And you know you told me, at the door, you didn't mean to go," retorted Rigaud. "In a word, madame, permit me to present two spies of the prisoner's—madmen, but spies. If you wish them to remain here during our little conversation, say the word. It is nothing to me."

"Why should I wish them to remain here?" said Mrs. Clennam. "What have I to do with them?"

"Then, dearest madame," said Rigaud, throwing himself into an arm-chair so heavily that the old room trembled, "you will do well to dismiss them. It is your affair. They are not *my* spies, not *my* rascals."

"Hark! You Pancks," said Mrs. Clennam, bending her brows upon him angrily, "you Casby's clerk! Attend to your employer's business and your own. Go. And take that other man with you."

"Thank you, ma'am," returned Mr. Pancks, "I am glad to say I see no objection to our both retiring. We have done all we undertook to do for Mr. Clennam. His constant anxiety has been (and it grew worse upon him when he became a prisoner), that this agreeable gentleman should be brought back here, to the place from which he slipped away. Here he is—brought back. And I will say," added Mr. Pancks, "to his ill-looking face, that in my opinion the world would be no worse for his slipping out of it altogether."

"Your opinion is not asked," answered Mrs. Clennam. "Go."

"I am sorry not to leave you in better company, ma'am," said Pancks; "and sorry, too, that Mr. Clennam can't be present. It's my fault, that is."

"You mean his own," she returned.

"No, I mean mine, ma'am," said Pancks, "for it was my misfortune to lead him into a ruinous investment." (Mr. Pancks still clung to that word, and never said speculation.) "Though I can prove by figures," added Mr. Pancks with an anxious countenance, "that it ought to have been a good investment. I have gone over it since it failed, every day of my life, and it comes out—regarded as a question of figures—triumphant. The present is not a time or place," Mr. Pancks pursued, with a longing glance into his hat, where he kept his calculations, "for entering upon the figures; but the figures are not to be disputed. Mr. Clennam ought to have been at this moment in his carriage-and-pair, and I ought to have been worth from three to five thousand pound."

Mr. Pancks put his hair erect with a general aspect of confidence, that could hardly have been surpassed if he had had the amount in his pocket. These incontrovertible figures had been the occupation of every moment of his leisure since he had lost his money, and were destined to afford him consolation to the end of his days.

"However," said Mr. Pancks, "enough of that. Altro, old boy,

you have seen the figures, and you know how they come out." Mr. Baptist, who had not the slightest arithmetical power of compensating himself in this way, nodded, with a fine display of bright teeth.

At whom Mr. Flintwinch had been looking, and to whom he then said:

"Oh! It's you, is it? I thought I remembered your face, but I wasn't certain till I saw your teeth. Ah! yes, to be sure. It was this officious refugee," said Jeremiah to Mrs. Clennam, "who came knocking at the door, on the night when Arthur and Chatterbox were here, and who asked me a whole Catechism of questions about Mr. Blandois."

"It is true," Mr. Baptist cheerfully admitted. "And behold him, padrone! I have found him, consequentementally."

"I shouldn't have objected," returned Mr. Flintwinch, "to your having broken your neck consequentementally."

"And now," said Mr. Pancks, whose eye had often stealthily wandered to the window-seat, and the stocking that was being mended there, "I've only one other word to say before I go. If Mr. Clennam was here—but unfortunately, though he has so far got the better of this fine gentleman as to return him to this place against his will, he is ill and in prison—ill and in prison, poor fellow—if he was here," said Mr. Pancks, taking one step aside towards the window-seat, and laying his right hand upon the stocking; "he would say, 'Affery, tell your dreams!'"

Mr. Pancks held up his right forefinger between his nose and the stocking, with a ghostly air of warning, turned, steamed out, and towed Mr. Baptist after him. The house-door was heard to close upon them, their steps were heard passing over the dull pavement of the echoing courtyard, and still nobody had added a word. Mrs. Clennam and Jeremiah had exchanged a look; and had then looked, and looked still, at Affery; who sat mending the stocking with great assiduity.

"Come!" said Mr. Flintwinch at length, screwing himself a curve or two in the direction of the window-seat, and rubbing the palms of his hands on his coat-tail as if he were preparing them to do something: "Whatever has to be said among us, had better be begun to be said, without more loss of time.—So, Affery, my woman, take yourself away!"

In a moment, Affery had thrown the stocking down, started up, caught hold of the window-sill with her right hand, lodged herself upon the window-seat with her right knee, and was flourishing her left hand, beating expected assailants off.

"No, I won't, Jeremiah—no I won't—no I won't! I won't go, I'll stay here. I'll hear all I don't know, and say all I know. I will, at last, if I die for it. I will, I will, I will, I will!"

Mr. Flintwinch, stiffening with indignation and amazement, moistened the fingers of one hand at his lips, softly described a circle with them in the palm of the other hand, and continued with a menacing grin to screw himself in the direction of his wife: gasping some remark as he advanced, of which, in his choking anger, only the words "Such a dose!" were audible.

"Not a bit nearer, Jeremiah!" cried Affery, never ceasing to beat

I demand—I think it was a thousand pounds. Will you correct me?"

Thus forced to speak, she replied, with constraint, "You demanded as much as a thousand pounds."

"I demand at present, Two. Such are the evils of delay. But to return once more. We are not accordant; we differ on that occasion. I am playful; playfulness is a part of my amiable character. Playfully, I become as one slain and hidden. For, it may alone be worth half the sum, to madame, to be freed from the suspicions that my droll idea awakens. Accident and spies intermix themselves against my playfulness, and spoil the fruit, perhaps—who knows? only you and Flintwinch—when it is just ripe. Thus, madame, I am here for the last time. Listen! Definitely the last."

As he struck his straggling boot-heels against the flap of the table, meeting her frown with an insolent gaze, he began to change his tone for a fiercer one.

"Bah! Stop an instant! Let us advance by steps. Here is my Hotel-note to be paid, according to contract. Five minutes hence we may be at daggers' points. I'll not leave it till then, or you'll cheat me. Pay it! Count me the money!"

"Take it from his hand and pay it, Flintwinch," said Mrs. Clennam.

He spirted it into Mr. Flintwinch's face, when the old man advanced to take it; and held forth his hand, repeating noisily, "Pay it! Count it out! Good money!" Jeremiah picked the bill up, looked at the total with a bloodshot eye, took a small canvass bag from his pocket, and told the amount into his hand.

Rigaud chinked the money, weighed it in his hand, threw it up a little way and caught it, chinked it again.

"The sound of it, to the bold Rigaud Blandois, is like the taste of fresh meat to the tiger. Say, then, madame. How much?"

He turned upon her suddenly, with a menacing gesture of the weighted hand that clenched the money, as if he were going to strike her with it.

"I tell you again, as I told you before, that we are not rich here, as you suppose us to be, and that your demand is excessive. I have not the present means of complying with such a demand, if I had ever so great an inclination."

"If!" cried Blandois. "Hear this lady with her If! Will you say that you have not the inclination?"

"I will say what presents itself to me, and not what presents itself to you."

"Say it then. As to the inclination. Quick! Come to the inclination, and I know what to do."

She was no quicker, and no slower, in her reply. "It would seem that you have obtained possession of a paper—or of papers—which I assuredly have the inclination to recover."

Rigaud, with a loud laugh, drummed his heels against the table, and chinked his money. "I think so! I believe you there!"

"The paper might be worth, to me, a sum of money. I cannot say how much, or how little."

"What the Devil!" he asked savagely. "Not after a week's grace to consider?"

"No! I will not, out of my scanty means—for I tell you again, we are poor here, and not rich—I will not offer any price for a power that I do not know the worst and the fullest extent of. This is the third time of your hinting and threatening. You must speak explicitly, or you may go where you will and do what you will. It is better to be torn to pieces at a spring, than to be a mouse at the caprice of such a cat."

He looked at her so hard with those eyes too near together, that the sinister sight of each, crossing that of the other, seemed to make the bridge of his hooked nose crooked. After a long survey, he said, with the further setting-off of his infernal smile:

"You are a bold woman!"

"I am a resolved woman."

"You always were. What? She always was; is it not so, my little Flintwinch?"

"Flintwinch, say nothing to him. It is for him to say here, and now, all he can; or to go hence, and do all he can. You know this to be our determination. Leave him to his action on it."

She did not shrink under his evil leer, or avoid it. He turned it upon her again, but she remained steady at the point to which she had fixed herself. He got off the table, placed a chair near the sofa, sat down in it, and leaned an arm upon the sofa close to her own, which he touched with his hand. Her face was ever frowning, attentive, and settled.

"It is your pleasure then, madame, that I shall relate a morsel of family history in this little family society," said Rigaud, with a warning play of his lithe fingers on her arm. "I am something of a doctor. Let me touch your pulse."

She suffered him to take her wrist in his hand. Holding it, he proceeded to say:

"A history of a strange marriage, and a strange mother, and a revenge, and a suppression.—Aye, aye, aye? This pulse is beating curiously! It appears to me that it doubles while I touch it. Are these the usual changes of your malady, madame?"

There was a struggle in her maimed arm as she twisted it away, but there was none in her face. On his face there was his own smile.

"I have lived an adventurous life. I am an adventurous character. I have known many adventurers; interesting spirits—amiable society! To one of them I owe my knowledge, and my proofs—I repeat it, estimable lady—proofs—of the ravishing little family history I go to commence. You will be charmed with it. But, bah! I forget. One should name a history. Shall I name it the history of a house? But, bah, again. There are so many houses. Shall I name it the history of this house?"

Leaning over the sofa, poised on two legs of his chair and his left elbow; that hand often tapping her arm, to beat his words home; his legs crossed; his right hand sometimes arranging his hair, sometimes smoothing his moustache, sometimes striking his nose, always

threatening her whatever it did; coarse, insolent, rapacious, cruel, and powerful; he pursued his narrative at his ease.

"In fine, then, I name it the history of this house. I commence it. There live here, let us suppose, an uncle and nephew. The uncle, a rigid old gentleman of strong force of character; the nephew, habitually timid, repressed, and under constraint."

Mistress Affery, fixedly attentive in the window-seat, biting the rolled up end of her apron, and trembling from head to foot, here cried out, "Jeremiah, keep off from me! I've heerd in my dreams, of Arthur's father and his uncle. He's a talking of them. It was before my time here; but I've heerd in my dreams that Arthur's father was a poor, irresolute, frightened chap, who had had everything but his orphan life scared out of him when he was young, and that he had no voice in the choice of his wife even, but his uncle chose her. There she sits! I heerd it in my dreams, and you said it to her own self."

As Mr. Flintwinch shook his fist at her, and as Mrs. Clennam gazed upon her, Rigaud kissed his hand to her.

"Perfectly right, dear Madame Flintwinch. You have a genius for dreaming."

"I don't want none of your praises," returned Affery. "I don't want to have nothing at all to say to you. But Jeremiah said they was dreams, and I'll tell 'em as such!" Here she put her apron in her mouth again, as if she were stopping somebody's else's mouth—perhaps Jeremiah's, which was chattering with threats as if he were grimly cold.

"Our beloved Madame Flintwinch," said Rigaud, "developing all of a sudden a fine susceptibility and spirituality, is right to a marvel. Yes. So runs the history. Monsieur, the uncle, commands the nephew to marry. Monsieur says to him in effect, 'My nephew, I introduce to you a lady of strong force of character, like myself: a resolved lady, a stern lady, a lady who has a will that can break the weak to powder: a lady without pity, without love, implacable, revengeful, cold as the stone, but raging as the fire.' Ah! what fortitude! Ah, what superiority of intellectual strength! Truly, a proud and noble character that I describe in the supposed words of Monsieur, the uncle. Ha, ha, ha! Death of my soul, I love the sweet lady!"

Mrs. Clennam's face had changed. There was a remarkable darkness of color on it and the brow was more contracted. "Madame, madame," said Rigaud, tapping her on the arm, as if his cruel hand were sounding a musical instrument, "I perceive I interest you. I perceive I awaken your sympathy. Let us go on!"

The drooping nose and the ascending moustache had, however, to be hidden for a moment with the white hand, before he could go on; he enjoyed the effect he made, so much.

"The nephew, being, as the lucid Madame Flintwinch has remarked, a poor devil who has had everything but his orphan life frightened and famished out of him—the nephew abases his head, and makes response; 'My uncle, it is to you to command. Do as you will!' Monsieur, the uncle, does as he will. It is what he always does. The auspicious nuptials take place; the newly married come home to this charming

mansion; the lady is received, let us suppose, by Flintwinch. Hey, old intriguer?"

Jeremiah, with his eyes upon his mistress, made no reply. Rigaud looked from one to the other, struck his ugly nose, and made a clucking with his tongue.

"Soon, the lady makes a singular and exciting discovery. Thereupon, full of anger, full of jealousy, full of vengeance, she forms—see you, madame!—a scheme of retribution, the weight of which she ingeniously forces her crushed husband to bear himself, as well as execute upon her enemy. What superior intelligence!"

"Keep off, Jeremiah!" cried the palpitating Affery, taking her apron from her mouth again. "But it was one of my dreams that you told her, when you quarrelled with her one winter evening, at dusk—there she sits and you looking at her—that she oughtn't to have let Arthur, when he come home, suspect his father, only; that she had always had the strength and the power; and that she ought to have stood up more, to Arthur, for his father. It was in the same dream where you said to her that she was not—not something, but I don't know what, for she burst out tremendous and stopped you. You know the dream as well as I do. When you come down stairs into the kitchen with the candle in your hand, and hitched my apron off my head. When you told me I had been dreaming. When you wouldn't believe the noises." After this explosion Affery put her apron into her mouth again; always keeping her hand on the window-sill, and her knee on the window-seat, ready to cry out or jump out, if her lord and master approached.

Rigaud had not lost a word of this.

"Haha!" he cried, lifting his eyebrows, folding his arms, and leaning back in his chair. "Assuredly, Madame Flintwinch is an oracle! How shall we interpret the oracle, you and I, and the old intriguer? He said that you were not, ——? And you burst out and stopped him! What was it you were not? What is it you are not? Say then, madame!"

Under this ferocious banter, she sat breathing harder, and her mouth was disturbed. Her lips quivered and opened, in spite of her utmost efforts to keep them still.

"Come then, madame! Speak, then! Our old intriguer said that you were not—— and you stopped him. He was going to say that you were not—what? I know already, but I want a little confidence from you. How, then? You are not what?"

She tried again to repress herself, but broke out vehemently, "Not Arthur's mother!"

"Good," said Rigaud. "You are amenable."

With the set expression of her face all torn away by the explosion of her passion, and with a bursting from every rent feature of the smouldering fire so long pent up, she cried out, "I will tell it myself! I will not hear it from your lips, and with the taint of your wickedness upon it. Since it must be seen, I will have it seen by the light I stood in. Not another word. Hear me!"

"Unless you are a more obstinate and more persisting woman, than even I know you to be," Mr. Flintwinch interposed, "you had

better leave Mr. Rigaud, Mr. Blandois, Mr. Beelzebub, to tell it in his own way. What does it signify when he knows all about it?"

"He does not know all about it."

"He knows all he cares about it," Mr. Flintwinch testily urged.

"He does not know *me*."

"What do you suppose he cares for you, you conceited woman?" said Mr. Flintwinch.

"I tell you, Flintwinch, I will speak. I tell you, when it has come to this, I will tell it with my own lips, and will express myself throughout it. What! Have I suffered nothing in this room, no deprivation, no imprisonment, that I should condescend at last to contemplate myself in such a glass as *that*! Can you see him? Can you hear him? If your wife were a hundred times the ingrate that she is, and if I were a thousand times more hopeless than I am of inducing her to be silent if this man is silenced, I would tell it myself, before I would bear the torment of hearing it from him."

Rigaud pushed his chair a little back; pushed his legs out straight before him; and sat with his arms folded, over against her.

"You do not know what it is," she went on, addressing him, "to be brought up strictly, and straitly. I was so brought up. Mine was no light youth of sinful gaiety and pleasure. Mine were days of wholesome repression, punishment, and fear. The corruption of our hearts, the evil of our ways, the curse that is upon us, the terrors that surround us—these were the themes of my childhood. They formed my character, and filled me with an abhorrence of evil-doers. When old Mr. Gilbert Clennam proposed his orphan nephew to my father for my husband, my father impressed upon me that his bringing-up had been, like mine, one of severe restraint. He told me, that besides the discipline his spirit had undergone, he had lived in a starved house, where rioting and gaiety were unknown, and where every day was a day of toil and trial like the last. He told me that he had been a man in years, long before his uncle had acknowledged him as one; and that from his schooldays to that hour, his uncle's roof had been a sanctuary to him from the contagion of the irreligious and dissolute. When, within a twelvemonth of our marriage, I found my husband, at that time when my father spoke of him, to have sinned against the Lord and outraged me by holding a guilty creature in my place, was I to doubt that it had been appointed to me to make the discovery, and that it was appointed to me to lay the hand of punishment upon that creature of perdition? Was I to dismiss in a moment—not my own wrongs—what was I! but all the rejection of sin, and all the war against it, in which I had been bred?"

She laid her wrathful hand upon the watch on the table.

"No! 'Do not forget.' The initials of those words are within here now, and were within here then. I was appointed to find the old letter that referred to them, and that told me what they meant, and whose work they were, and why they were worked, lying with this watch in his secret drawer. But for that appointment, there would have been no discovery. 'Do not forget.' It spoke to me like a voice from an angry cloud. Do not forget the deadly sin, do not forget the appointed discovery, do not forget the appointed suffering. I did not

forget. Was it my own wrong I remembered? Mine! I was but a servant and a minister. What power could I have had over them, but that they were bound in the bonds of their sin, and delivered to me!"

More than forty years had passed over the grey head of this determined woman, since the time she recalled. More than forty years of strife and struggle with the whisper that, by whatever name she called her vindictive pride and rage, nothing through all eternity could change their nature. Yet, gone those more than forty years, and come this Nemesis now looking her in the face, she still abided by her old impiety—still reversed the order of Creation, and breathed her own breath into a clay image of her Creator. Verily, verily, travellers have seen many monstrous idols in many countries; but, no human eyes have ever seen more daring, gross, and shocking images of the Divine nature, than we creatures of the dust make in our own likenesses, of our own bad passions.

"When I forced him to give her up to me, by her name and place of abode," she went on in her torrent of indignation and defence; "when I accused her, and she fell hiding her face at my feet, was it my injury that I asserted, were they my reproaches that I poured upon her? Those who were appointed of old to go to wicked kings and accuse them—were they not ministers and servants? And had not I, unworthy, and far-removed from them, sin to denounce? When she pleaded to me her youth, and his wretched and hard life (that was her phrase for the virtuous training he had belied), and the desecrated ceremony of marriage there had secretly been between them, and the terrors of want and shame that had overwhelmed them both, when I was first appointed to be the instrument of their punishment, and the love (for she said the word to me, down at my feet) in which she had abandoned him and left him to me, was it *my* enemy that became my footstool, were they the words of *my* wrath that made her shrink and quiver! Not unto me the strength be ascribed; not unto me the wringing of the expiation!"

Many years had come, and gone, since she had had the free use even of her fingers; but, it was noticeable that she had already more than once struck her clenched hand vigorously upon the table, and that when she said these words she raised her whole arm in the air, as though it had been a common action with her.

"And what was the repentance that was extorted from the hardness of her heart and the blackness of her depravity? I, vindictive and implacable? It may seem so, to such as you who know no righteousness, and no appointment except Satan's. Laugh; but I will be known as I know myself, and as Flintwinch knows me, though it is only to you and this half-witted woman."

"Add, to yourself, madame," said Rigaud. "I have my little suspicions, that madame is rather solicitous to be justified to herself."

"It is false. It is not so. I have no need to be," she said, with great energy and anger.

"Truly?" retorted Rigaud. "Hah!"

"I ask, what was the penitence, in works, that was demanded of her? 'You have a child; I have none. You love that child. Give him to me. He shall believe himself to be my son, and he shall be believed by every

one to be my son. To save you from exposure, his father shall swear never to see or communicate with you more; equally to save him from being stripped by his uncle, and to save your child from being a beggar, you shall swear never to see or communicate with either of them more. That done, and your present means, derived from my husband, renounced, I charge myself with your support. You may, with your place of retreat unknown, then leave, if you please, uncontradicted by me, the lie that when you passed out of all knowledge but mine, you merited a good name.' That was all. She had to sacrifice her sinful and shameful affections; no more. She was then free to bear her load of guilt in secret, and to break her heart in secret; and through such present misery (light enough for her, I think!) to purchase her redemption from endless misery, if she could. If, in this, I punished her here, did I not open to her a way hereafter? If she knew herself to be surrounded by insatiable vengeance and unquenchable fires, were they mine? If I threatened her, then and afterwards, with the terrors that encompassed her, did I hold them in my right hand?"

She turned the watch upon the table, and opened it, and, with an unsoftening face, looked at the worked letters within.

"They did *not* forget. It is appointed against such offences that the offenders shall not be able to forget. If the presence of Arthur was a daily reproach to his father, and if the absence of Arthur was a daily agony to his mother, that was the just dispensation of Jehovah. As well might it be charged upon me, that the stings of an awakened conscience drove her mad, and that it was the will of the disposer of all things that she should live so, many years. I devoted myself to reclaim the otherwise predestined and lost boy; to give him the reputation of an honest origin; to bring him up in fear and trembling, and in a life of practical contrition for the sins that were heavy on his head before his entrance into this condemned world. Was that a cruelty? Was I too, not visited with consequences of the original offence, in which I had no complicity? Arthur's father and I lived no further apart, with half the globe between us, than when we were together in this house. He died, and sent this watch back to me, with its *Do not forget*. I do *not* forget, though I do not read it as he did. I read, in it, that I was appointed to do these things. I have so read these three letters since I have had them lying on this table, and I did so read them, with equal distinctness, when they were thousands of miles away."

As she took the watch-case in her hand, with that new freedom in the use of her hand of which she showed no consciousness whatever, bending her eyes upon it as if she were defying it to move her, Rigaud cried with a loud and contemptuous snapping of his fingers, "Come, madame! Time runs out. Come, lady of piety, it must be! You can tell nothing I don't know. Come to the money stolen, or I will! Death of my soul, I have had enough of your other jargon. Come straight to the stolen money!"

"Wretch, that you are," she answered, and now her hands clasped her head; "through what fatal error of Flintwinch's, through what incompleteness on his part, who was the only other person helping in these things and trusted with them, through whose and what bringing

together of the ashes of a burnt paper, you have become possessed of that codicil, I know no more than how you acquired the rest of your power here——”

“And yet,” interrupted Rigaud, “it is my odd fortune to have by me, in a convenient place that I know of, that same short little addition to the will of Monsieur Gilbert Clennam, written by a lady and witnessed by the same lady, and our old intriguer! Ah, bah, old intriguer, crooked little puppet! Madame, let us go on. Time presses. You or I to finish?”

“I!” she answered, with increased determination, if it were possible. “I, because I will not endure to be shown myself, and have myself shown to any one, with your horrible distortion upon me. You, with your practices of infamous foreign prisons and galleys, would make it the money that impelled me. It was not the money.”

“Bah, bah, bah! I repudiate, for the moment, my politeness, and say, Lies, lies, lies. You know you suppressed the deed, and kept the money.”

“Not for the money’s sake, wretch!” She made a struggle as if she were starting up; even as if, in her vehemence, she had almost risen on her disabled feet. “If Gilbert Clennam, reduced to imbecility, at the point of death, and laboring under the delusion of some imaginary relenting towards a girl, of whom he had heard that his nephew had once had a fancy for her, which he had crushed out of him, and that she afterwards drooped away into melancholy and withdrawal from all who knew her—if, in that state of weakness, he dictated to me, whose life she had darkened with her sin, and who had been appointed to know her wickedness from her own hand and her own lips, a bequest meant as a recompense to her for supposed unmerited suffering; was there no difference between my spurning that injustice, and coveting mere money—a thing which you, and your comrades in the prisons, may steal from any one?”

“Time presses, madame. Take care!”

“If this house was blazing from the roof to the ground,” she returned, “I would stay in it to justify myself, against my righteous motives being classed with those of stabbers and thieves.”

Rigaud snapped his fingers tauntingly in her face. “One thousand guineas to the little beauty you slowly hunted to death. One thousand guineas to the youngest daughter her patron might have at fifty, or (if he had none) brother’s youngest daughter, on her coming of age, ‘as the remembrance his disinterestedness may like best, of his protection of a friendless young orphan girl.’ Two thousand guineas. What! You will never come to the money?”

“That patron,” she was vehemently proceeding, when he checked her.

“Names! Call him Mr. Frederick Dorrit. No more evasions!”

“That Frederick Dorrit was the beginning of it all. If he had not been a player of music, and had not kept, in those days of his youth and prosperity, an idle house where singers, and players, and such-like children of Evil, turned their backs on the Light and their faces to the Darkness, she might have remained in her lowly station, and might not have been raised out of it to be cast down. But, no. Satan entered into that Frederick Dorrit, and counselled him that he was a man of innocent and laudable

tastes who did kind actions, and that here was a poor girl with a voice for singing music with. Then he is to have her taught. Then Arthur's father, who has all along been secretly pining in the ways of virtuous ruggedness, for those accursed snares which are called the Arts, becomes acquainted with her. And so, a graceless orphan, training to be a singing girl, carries it, by that Frederick Dorrit's agency, against me, and I am humbled and deceived!—Not I, that is to say," she added quickly, as color flushed into her face; "a greater than I. What am I?"

Jeremiah Flintwinch, who had been gradually screwing himself towards her, and who was now very near her elbow without her knowing it, made a specially wry face of objection when she said these words, and moreover twitched his gaiters, as if such pretensions were equivalent to little barbs in his legs.

"Lastly," she continued, "for I am at the end of these things, and I will say no more of them, and you shall say no more of them, and all that remains will be to determine whether the knowledge of them can be kept among us who are here present; lastly, when I suppressed that paper, with the knowledge of Arthur's father—"

"But not with his consent, you know," said Mr. Flintwinch.

"Who said with his consent?" She started to find Jeremiah so near her, and drew back her head, looking at him with some rising distrust. "You were often enough between us, when he would have had me produce it and I would not, to have contradicted me if I had said, with his consent. I say, when I suppressed that paper, I made no effort to destroy it, but kept it by me, here in this house, many years. The rest of the Gilbert property being left to Arthur's father, I could at any time, without unsettling more than the two sums, have made a pretence of finding it. But, besides that I must have supported such pretence by a direct falsehood, (a great responsibility,) I have seen no new reason, in all the time I have been tried here, to bring it to light. It was a rewarding of sin; the wrong result of a delusion. I did what I was appointed to do, and I have undergone, within these four walls, what I was appointed to undergo. When the paper was at last destroyed—as I thought—in my presence, she had long been dead, and her patron, Frederick Dorrit, had long been deservedly ruined and imbecile. He had no daughter. I had found the niece before then; and what I did for her was better for her, far, than the money of which she would have had no good." She added, after a moment, as though she addressed the watch: "She herself was innocent, and I might not have forgotten to relinquish it to her, at my death;" and sat looking at it.

"Shall I recall something to you, worthy madame?" said Rigaud. "The little paper was in this house, on the night when our friend the prisoner—jail-comrade of my soul—came home from foreign countries. Shall I recall yet something more to you? The little singing-bird that never was fledged, was long kept in a cage, by a guardian of your appointing, well-enough known to our old intriguer here. Shall we coax our old intriguer to tell us when he saw him last?"

"I'll tell you!" cried Affery, unstopping her mouth. "I dreamed it, first of all my dreams. Jeremiah, if you come a-nigh me now, I'll scream to be heard at St. Paul's! The person as this man has

spoken of, was Jeremiah's own twin brother; and he was here in the dead of the night, on the night when Arthur come home, and Jeremiah with his own hands give him this paper, along with I don't know what more, and he took it away in an iron box.—Help! Murder! Save me from Jere-mi-ah!”

Mr. Flintwinch had made a run at her, but Rigaud had caught him in his arms midway. After a moment's wrestle with him, Flintwinch gave up, and put his hands in his pockets.

“What!” cried Rigaud, rallying him as he poked and jerked him back with his elbows. “Assault a lady with such a genius for dreaming? Ha, ha, ha! Why, she'll be a fortune to you as an exhibition. All that she dreams comes true. Ha, ha, ha! You're so like him, Little Flintwinch. So like him, as I knew him (when I first spoke English for him to the host) in the Cabaret of the Three Billiard Tables, in the little street of the high roofs, by the wharf at Antwerp! Ah, but he was a brave boy to drink. Ah, but he was a brave boy to smoke! Ah, but he lived in a sweet bachelor-apartment—furnished, on the fifth floor, above the wood and charcoal merchant's, and the dress-makers, and the chair-makers, and the maker of tubs—where I knew him too, and where, with his cognac and tobacco, he had twelve sleeps a day and one fit, until he had a fit too much, and ascended to the skies. Ha, ha, ha! What does it matter how I took possession of the papers in his iron box? Perhaps he confided it to my hands for you, perhaps it was locked and my curiosity was piqued, perhaps I suppressed it. Ha, ha, ha! What does it matter, so that I have it safe? We are not particular here; hey, Flintwinch? We are not particular here; is it not so, madame?”

Retiring before him with vicious counter-jerks of his own elbows, Mr. Flintwinch had got back into his corner, where he now stood with his hands in his pockets, taking breath, and returning Mrs. Clennam's stare. “Ha, ha, ha! But what's this?” cried Rigaud. “It appears as if you don't know, one the other. Permit me, Madame Clennam who suppresses, to present Monsieur Flintwinch who intrigues.”

Mr. Flintwinch, unpocketing one of his hands to scrape his jaw, advanced a step or so in that attitude, still returning Mrs. Clennam's look, and thus addressed her:

“Now, I know what you mean by opening your eyes so wide at me, but you needn't take the trouble, because I don't care for it. I've been telling you for how many years, that you're one of the most opiniated and obstinate of women. That's what *you* are. You call yourself humble and sinful, but you are the most Bumptious of your sex. That's what *you* are. I have told you, over and over again when we have had a tiff, that you wanted to make everything go down before you, but I wouldn't go down before you—that you wanted to swallow up everybody alive, but I wouldn't be swallowed up alive. Why didn't you destroy the paper when you first laid hands upon it? I advised you to; but no, it's not your way to take advice. You must keep it, forsooth. Perhaps you may carry it out at some other time, forsooth. As if I didn't know better than that! I think I see your pride carrying it out, with a chance of being suspected of having kept it by you. But that's the way you cheat yourself. Just

as you cheat yourself into making out, that you didn't do all this business because you were a rigorous woman, all slight, and spite, and power, and unforgiveness, but because you were a servant and a minister, and were appointed to do it. Who are you, that you should be appointed to do it? That may be your religion, but it's my gammon. And, to tell you all the truth while I am about it," said Mr. Flintwinch, crossing his arms, and becoming the express image of irascible doggedness, "I have been rasped—rasped these forty years—by your taking such high ground even with me, who knows better; the effect of it being coolly to put me on low ground. I admire you very much; you are a woman of strong head and great talent; but the strongest head, and the greatest talent, can't rasp a man for forty years without making him sore. So I don't care for your present eyes. Now, I am coming to the paper, and mark what I say. You put it away somewhere, and you keep your own counsel where. You're an active woman at that time, and if you want to get that paper, you can get it. But, mark! There comes a time when you are struck into what you are now, and then if you want to get that paper, you can't get it. So it lies, long years, in its hiding-place. At last, when we are expecting Arthur home every day, and when any day may bring him home, and it's impossible to say what rummaging he may make about the house, I recommend you five thousand times, if you can't get at it, to let me get at it, that it may be put in the fire. But no—no one but you knows where it is, and that's power; and, call yourself whatever humble names you will, I call you a female Lucifer in appetite for power! On a Sunday night, Arthur comes home. He has not been in this room ten minutes, when he speaks of his father's watch. You know very well that the Do Not Forget, at the time when his father sent that watch to you, could only mean, the rest of the story being then all dead and over, Do Not Forget the suppression. Make restitution! Arthur's ways have frightened you a bit, and the paper shall be burnt after all. So, before that jumping jade and Jezabel," Mr. Flintwinch grinned at his wife, "has got you into bed, you at last tell me where you have put the paper, among the old ledgers in the cellars, where Arthur himself went prowling the very next morning. But, it's not to be burnt on a Sunday night. No; you are strict, you are; we must wait over twelve o'clock, and get into Monday. Now, all this is a swallowing of me up alive, that rasps me; so, feeling a little out of temper, and not being as strict as yourself, I take a look at the document before twelve o'clock, to refresh my memory as to its appearance—fold up one of the many yellow old papers in the cellars like it—and afterwards, when we have got into Monday morning, and I have, by the light of your lamp, to walk from you, lying on that bed, to this grate, make a little exchange like the conjuror, and burn accordingly. My brother Ephraim, the lunatic-keeper (I wish he had had himself to keep in a strait-waistcoat), had had many jobs since the close of the long job he got from you, but had not done well. His wife died (not that that was much; mine might have died instead, and welcome), he speculated unsuccessfully in lunatics, he got into difficulty about over-roasting a patient to bring him to reason, and he got into debt. He was going out of

the way, on what he had been able to scrape up, and a trifle from me. He was here that early Monday morning, waiting for the tide; in short, he was going to Antwerp, where (I am afraid you 'll be shocked at my saying, And be damned to him!) he made the acquaintance of this gentleman. He had come a long way, and, I thought then, was only sleepy; but, I suppose now, was drunk. When Arthur's mother had been under the care of him and his wife, she had been always writing, incessantly writing,—mostly letters of confession to you, and Prayers for forgiveness. My brother had handed, from time to time, lots of these sheets to me. I thought I might as well keep them to myself, as have them swallowed up alive too; so I kept them in a box, looking them over when I felt in the humour. Convinced that it was advisable to get the paper out of the place, with Arthur coming about it, I put it into this same box, and I locked the whole up with two locks, and I trusted it to my brother to take away and keep, till I should write about it. I did write about it, and never got an answer. I didn't know what to make of it, till this gentleman favoured us with his first visit. Of course, I began to suspect how it was, then; and I don't want his word for it now to understand, how he gets his knowledge from my papers, and your paper, and my brother's cognac and tobacco talk (I wish he'd had to gag himself). Now, I have only one thing more to say, you hammer-headed woman, and that is, that I haven't altogether made up my mind whether I might, or might not, have ever given you any trouble about the codicil. I think not; and that I should have been quite satisfied with knowing I had got the better of you, and that I held the power over you. In the present state of circumstances, I have no more explanation to give you till this time tomorrow-night. So you may as well," said Mr. Flintwinch, terminating his oration with a screw, "keep your eyes open at somebody else, for it's no use keeping 'em open at me."

She slowly withdrew them when he had ceased, and dropped her forehead on her hand. Her other hand pressed hard upon the table, and again the curious stir was observable in her, as if she were going to rise.

"This box can never bring, elsewhere, the price it will bring here. This knowledge can never be of the same profit to you, sold to any other person, as sold to me. But, I have not the present means of raising the sum you have demanded. I have not prospered. What will you take now, and what at another time, and how am I to be assured of your silence?"

"My angel," replied Rigaud, "I have said what I will take, and time presses. Before coming here, I placed copies of the most important of these papers in another hand. Put off the time till the Marshalsea gate shall be shut for the night, and it will be too late to treat. The prisoner will have read them."

She put her two hands to her head again, uttered a loud exclamation, and started to her feet. She staggered for a moment, as if she would have fallen; then stood firm.

"Say what you mean. Say what you mean, man!"

Before her ghostly figure, so long unused to its erect attitude, and

so stiffened in it, Rigaud fell back and dropped his voice. It was, to all the three, almost as if a dead woman had risen.

"Miss Dorrit," answered Rigaud, "the little niece of Monsieur Frederick, whom I have known across the water, is attached to the prisoner. Miss Dorrit, little niece of Monsieur Frederick, watches at this moment over the prisoner, who is ill. For her, I with my own hands left a packet at the prison, on my way here, with a letter of instructions, '*for his sake*'—she will do anything for his sake—to keep it without breaking the seal, in case of its being reclaimed before the hour of shutting up to-night—if it should not be reclaimed before the ringing of the prison bell, to give it to him; and it encloses a second copy for herself, which he must give to her. What! I don't trust myself among you, now we have got so far, without giving my secret a second life. And as to its not bringing me, elsewhere, the price it will bring here, say then, madame, have you limited and settled the price the little niece will give—for his sake—to hush it up? Once more I say, time presses. The packet not reclaimed before the ringing of the bell to-night, you cannot buy. I sell, then, to the little girl!"

Once more the stir and struggle in her, and she ran to a closet, tore the door open, took down a hood or shawl, and wrapped it over her head. Affery, who had watched her in terror, darted to her in the middle of the room, caught hold of her dress, and went on her knees to her.

"Don't, don't, don't! What are you doing? Where are you going? You're a fearful woman, but I don't bear you no ill-will. I can do poor Arthur no good now, that I see; and you needn't be afraid of me. I'll keep your secret. Don't go out, you'll fall dead in the street. Only promise me, that, if it's the poor thing that's kept here, secretly, you'll let me take charge of her and be her nurse. Only promise me that, and never be afraid of me."

Mrs. Clennam stood still for an instant, at the height of her rapid haste, saying in stern amazement:

"Kept here? She has been dead a score of years and more. Ask Flintwinch—ask *him*. They can both tell you that she died, when Arthur went abroad."

"So much the worse," said Affery, with a shiver, "for she haunts the house, then. Who else rustles about it, making signals by dropping dust so softly? Who else comes and goes, and marks the walls with long crooked touches, when we are all a-bed? Who else holds the doors sometimes? But don't go out—don't go out! Mistress, you'll die in the street!"

Her mistress only disengaged her dress from the beseeching hands, said to Rigaud, "Wait here till I come back!" and ran out of the room. They saw her, from the window, run wildly through the courtyard and out at the gateway.

For a few moments they stood motionless. Affery was the first to move, and she, wringing her hands, pursued her mistress. Next, Jeremiah Flintwinch, slowly backing to the door, with one hand in a pocket and the other rubbing his chin, twisted himself out in his reticent way, speechlessly. Rigaud, left alone, composed himself upon the window-seat of the open window, in the old Marseilles-

Jail attitude. He laid his cigarettes and fire-box ready to his hand, and fell to smoking.

"Whoof! Almost as dull as the infernal old jail. Warmer, but almost as dismal. Wait till she comes back? Yes, certainly; but where is she gone, and how long will she be gone? No matter! Rigaud Lagnier Blandois, my amiable subject, you will get your money. You will enrich yourself. You have lived a gentleman; you will die a gentleman. You triumph, my little boy; but it is your character to triumph. Whoof!"

In the hour of his triumph, his moustache went up and his nose came down, as he ogled a great beam over his head with particular satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CLOSED.

THE sun had set, and the streets were dim in the dusty twilight, when the figure so long unused to them hurried on its way. In the immediate neighbourhood of the old house, it attracted little attention, for there were only a few straggling people to notice it; but, ascending from the river, by the crooked ways that led to London Bridge, and passing into the great main road, it became surrounded by astonishment.

Resolute and wild of look, rapid of foot, and yet weak and uncertain, conspicuously dressed in its black garments and with its hurried head covering, gaunt and of an unearthly paleness, it pressed forward, taking no more heed of the throng than a sleep-walker. More remarkable by being so removed from the crowd it was among, than if it had been lifted on a pedestal to be seen, the figure attracted all eyes. Saunterers pricked up their attention to observe it; busy people, crossing it, slackened their pace and turned their heads; companions pausing and standing aside, whispered one another to look at this spectral woman who was coming by; and the sweep of the figure as it passed seemed to create a vortex, drawing the most idle and most curious after it.

Made giddy by the turbulent irruption of this multitude of staring faces into her cell of years, by the confusing sensation of being in the air and the yet more confusing sensation of being afoot, by the unexpected changes in half-remembered objects, and the want of likeness between the controllable pictures her imagination had often drawn of the life from which she was secluded, and the overwhelming rush of the reality, she held her way as if she were environed by distracting thoughts, rather than by external humanity and observation. But, having crossed the bridge, and gone some distance straight onward, she remembered that she must ask for a direction; and it was only

then, when she stopped and turned to look about her for a promising place of enquiry, that she found herself surrounded by an eager glare of faces.

"Why are you encircling me?" she asked, trembling.

None of those who were nearest answered; but, from the outer ring, there arose a shrill cry of "'Cause you're mad!"

"I am as sane as anyone here. I want to find the Marshalsea prison."

The shrill outer circle again retorted, "Then that 'ud show you was mad if nothing else did, 'cause it's right opposite!"

A short, mild, quiet-looking young man, made his way through to her, as a whooping ensued on this reply, and said: "Was it the Marshalsea you wanted? I'm going on duty there. Come across with me."

She laid her hand upon his arm, and he took her over the way; the crowd, rather injured by the near prospect of losing her, pressing before and behind and on either side, and recommending an adjournment to Bedlam. After a momentary whirl in the outer courtyard, the prison-door opened, and shut upon them. In the lodge, which seemed by contrast with the outer noise a place of refuge and peace, a yellow lamp was already striving with the prison shadows.

"Why, John!" said the turnkey who had admitted them. "What is it?"

"Nothing, father; only this lady not knowing her way, and living badgered by the boys. Who did you want, ma'am?"

"Miss Dorrit. Is she here?"

The young man became more interested. "Yes, she is here. What might your name be?"

"Mrs. Clennam."

"Mr. Clennam's mother?" asked the young man.

She pressed her lips together, and hesitated. "Yes. She had better be told it is his mother."

"You see," said the young man, "the Marshal's family living in the country at present, the Marshal has given Miss Dorrit one of the rooms in his house, to use when she likes. Don't you think you had better come up there, and let me bring Miss Dorrit?"

She signified her assent, and he unlocked a door, and conducted her up a side staircase into a dwelling-house above. He showed her into a darkening room, and left her. The room looked down into the darkening prison-yard, with its inmates strolling here and there, leaning out of windows, communing as much apart as they could with friends who were going away, and generally wearing out their imprisonment as they best might, that summer evening. The air was heavy and hot; the closeness of the place, oppressive; and from without there arose a rush of free sounds, like the jarring memory of such things in a headache and heartache. She stood at the window, bewildered, looking down into this prison as it were out of her own different prison, when a soft word or two of surprise made her start, and Little Dorrit stood before her.

"Is it possible, Mrs. Clennam, that you are so happily recovered as——"

Little Dorrit stopped, for there was neither happiness nor health in the face that turned to her.

"This is not recovery; it is not strength; I don't know what it is." With an agitated wave of her hand, she put all that aside. "You have had a packet left with you, which you were to give to Arthur if it was not reclaimed before this place closed to-night."

"Yes."

"I reclaim it."

Little Dorrit took it from her bosom, and gave it into her hand, which remained stretched out, after receiving it.

"Have you any idea of its contents?"

Frightened by her being there, with that new power of movement in her, which, as she had said herself, was not strength, and which was unreal to look upon, as though a picture or a statue had been animated, Little Dorrit answered, "No."

"Read them."

Little Dorrit took the packet from the still outstretched hand, and broke the seal. Mrs. Clennam then gave her the inner packet that was addressed to herself, and held the other. The shadow of the wall and of the prison-buildings, which made the room sombre at noon, made it too dark to read there, with the dusk deepening apace, save in the window. In the window, where a little of the bright summer evening sky could shine upon her, Little Dorrit stood, and read. After a broken exclamation or so of wonder and of terror, she read in silence. When she had finished, she looked round, and her old mistress bowed herself before her.

"You know, now, what I have done."

"I think so. I am afraid so; though my mind is so hurried, and so sorry, and has so much to pity, that it has not been able to follow all I have read," said Little Dorrit, tremulously.

"I will restore to you what I have withheld from you. Forgive me. Can you forgive me?"

"I can, and Heaven knows I do! Do not kiss my dress and kneel to me; you are too old to kneel to me; I forgive you freely, without that."

"I have more to ask yet."

"Not in that posture," said Little Dorrit. "It is unnatural to see your grey hair lower than mine. Pray rise; let me help you." With that she raised her up, and stood rather shrinking from her, but looking at her earnestly.

"The great petition that I make to you (there is another which grows out of it), the great supplication that I address to your merciful and gentle heart, is, that you will not disclose this to Arthur until I am dead. If you think, when you have had time for consideration, that it can do him any good to know it while I am yet alive, then tell him. But, you will not think that; and in such case, will you promise me to spare me until I am dead?"

"I am so sorry, and what I have read has so confused my thoughts," returned Little Dorrit, "that I can scarcely give you a steady answer. If I should be quite sure that to be acquainted with it will do Mr. Clennam no good——"

"I know you are attached to him, and will make him the first consideration. It is right that he should be the first consideration; I ask that. But, having regarded him, and still finding that you may spare me for the little time I shall remain on earth, will you do it?"

"I will."

"God bless you!"

She stood in the shadow so that she was only a veiled form to Little Dorrit in the light; but, the sound of her voice, in saying those three grateful words, was at once fervent and broken. Broken by emotion as unfamiliar to her frozen eyes as action to her frozen limbs.

"You will wonder, perhaps," she said in a stronger tone, "that I can better bear to be known to you whom I have wronged, than to the son of my enemy who wronged me.—For, she did wrong me! She not only sinned grievously against the Lord, but she wronged me. What Arthur's father was to me, she made him. From our marriage day I was his dread, and that she made me. I was the scourge of both, and that is referable to her. You love Arthur (I can see the blush upon your face; may it be the dawn of happier days to both of you!), and you will have thought already that he is as merciful and kind as you, and why do I not trust myself to him as soon as to you. Have you not thought so?"

"No thought," said Little Dorrit, "can be quite a stranger to my heart, that springs out of the knowledge that Mr. Clennam is always to be relied upon for being kind and generous and good."

"I do not doubt it. Yet Arthur is, of the whole world, the one person from whom I would conceal this, while I am in it. I kept over him as a child, in the days of his first remembrance, my restraining and correcting hand. I was stern with him, knowing that the transgressions of the parents are visited on their offspring, and that there was an angry mark upon him at his birth. I have sat with him and his father, seeing the weakness of his father yearning to unbend to him; and forcing it back, that the child might work out his release in bondage and hardship. I have seen him, with his mother's face, looking up at me in awe from his little books, and trying to soften me with his mother's ways that hardened me."

The shrinking of her auditress stopped her for a moment in her flow of words, delivered in a retrospective gloomy voice.

"For his good. Not for the satisfaction of my injury. What was I, and what was the worth of that, before the curse of Heaven! I have seen that child grow up; not to be pious in a chosen way (his mother's offence lay too heavy on him for that), but still to be just and upright, and to be submissive to me. He never loved me, as I once half-hoped he might—so frail we are, and so do the corrupt affections of the flesh war with our trusts and tasks; but, he always respected me, and ordered himself dutifully to me. He does to this hour. With an empty place in his heart that he has never known the meaning of, he has turned away from me, and gone his separate road; but, even that he has done considerably and with deference. These have been his relations towards me. Yours have been of a much slighter kind, spread over a much shorter time. When you

have sat at your needle in my room, you have been in fear of me, but you have supposed me to have been doing you a kindness; you are better informed now, and know me to have done you an injury. Your misconstruction and misunderstanding of the cause in which, and the motives with which, I have worked out this work, is lighter to endure than his would be. I would not, for any worldly recompense I can imagine, have him in a moment, however blindly, throw me down from the station I have held before him all his life, and change me altogether, into something he would cast out of his respect, and think detected and exposed. Let him do it, if it must be done, when I am not here to see it. Let me never feel, while I am still alive, that I die before his face, and utterly perish away from him, like one consumed by lightning and swallowed by an earthquake."

Her pride was very strong in her, the pain of it and of her old passions was very sharp with her, when she thus expressed herself. Not less so, when she added:

"Even now, I see *you* shrink from me, as if I had been cruel."

Little Dorrit could not gainsay it. She tried not to show it, but she recoiled with dread from the state of mind that had burnt so fiercely and lasted so long. It presented itself to her with no sophistry upon it, in its own plain nature.

"I have done," said Mrs. Clennam, "what it was given to me to do. I have set myself against evil; not against good. I have been an instrument of severity against sin. Have not mere sinners like myself been commissioned to lay it low in all time?"

"In all time?" repeated Little Dorrit.

"Even if my own wrong had prevailed with me, and my own vengeance had moved me, could I have found no justification? None in the old days when the innocent perished with the guilty, a thousand to one? When the wrath of the hater of the unrighteous was not slaked even in blood, and yet found favor?"

"O, Mrs. Clennam, Mrs. Clennam," said Little Dorrit, "angry feelings and unforgiving deeds are no comfort and no guide to you and me. My life has been passed in this poor prison, and my teaching has been very defective; but, let me implore you to remember later and better days. Be guided, only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain!"

In the softened light of the window, looking from the scene of her early trials to the shining sky, she was not in stronger opposition to the black figure in the shade, than the life and doctrine on which she rested were to that figure's history. It bent its head low again, and said not a word. It remained thus, until the first warning bell began to ring.

"Hark!" cried Mrs. Clennam, starting. "I said I had another petition. It is one that does not admit of delay. The man who brought you this packet and possesses these proofs, is now waiting at my house, to be

bought off. I can keep this from Arthur, only by buying him off. He asks a large sum; more than I can get together to pay him, without having time. He refuses to make any abatement, because his threat is, that if he fails with me he will come to you. Will you return with me, and show him that you already know it? Will you return with me and try to prevail with him? Will you come and help me with him? Do not refuse what I ask in Arthur's name, though I dare not ask it for Arthur's sake!"

Little Dorrit yielded willingly. She glided away into the prison for a few moments, returned, and said she was ready to go. They went out by another staircase, avoiding the lodge; and, coming into the front courtyard, now all quiet and deserted, gained the street.

It was one of those summer evenings when there is no greater darkness than a long twilight. The vista of street and bridge was plain to see, and the sky was serene and beautiful. People stood and sat at their doors, playing with children and enjoying the evening; numbers were walking for air; the worry of the day had almost worried itself out, and few but themselves were hurried. As they crossed the bridge, the clear steeples of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them and come much nearer. The smoke that rose into the sky had lost its dingy hue and taken a brightness upon it. The beauties of the sunset had not faded from the long light films of cloud that lay at peace in the horizon. From a radiant centre, over the whole length and breadth of the tranquil firmament, great shoots of light streamed among the early stars, like signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory.

Less remarkable, now that she was not alone and it was darker, Mrs. Clennam hurried on at Little Dorrit's side, unmolested. They left the great thoroughfare at the turning by which she had entered it, and wound their way down among the silent, empty, cross-streets. Their feet were at the gateway, when there was a sudden noise like thunder.

"What was that! Let us make haste in," cried Mrs. Clennam.

They were in the gateway. Little Dorrit, with a piercing cry, held her back.

In one swift instant, the old house was before them, with the man lying smoking in the window; another thundering sound, and it heaved, surged outward, opened asunder in fifty places, collapsed, and fell. Deafened by the noise, stifled, choked, and blinded by the dust, they hid their faces and stood rooted to the spot. The dust storm, driving between them and the placid sky, parted for a moment and showed them the stars. As they looked up, wildly crying for help, the great pile of chimneys which was then alone left standing, like a tower in a whirlwind, rocked, broke, and hailed itself down upon the heap of ruin, as if every tumbling fragment were intent on burying the crushed wretch deeper.

So blackened by the flying particles of rubbish as to be unrecognisable, they ran back from the gateway into the street crying, and shrieking. There, Mrs. Clennam dropped upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the

power to speak one word. For upwards of three years she reclined in her wheeled chair, looking attentively at those about her, and appearing to understand what they said; but, the rigid silence she had so long held was evermore enforced upon her, and, except that she could move her eyes and faintly express a negative and affirmative with her head, she lived and died a statue.

Affery had been looking for them at the prison, and had caught sight of them at a distance on the bridge. She came up to receive her old mistress in her arms, to help to carry her into a neighbouring house, and to be faithful to her. The mystery of the noises was out now; Affery, like greater people, had always been right in her facts, and always wrong in the theories she deduced from them.

When the storm of dust had cleared away and the summer night was calm again, numbers of people choked up every avenue of access, and parties of diggers were formed to relieve one another in digging among the ruins. There had been a hundred people in the house at the time of its fall, there had been fifty, there had been fifteen, there had been two. Rumour finally settled the number at two: the foreigner and Mr. Flintwinch.

The diggers dug all through the short night by flaring pipes of gas, and on a level with the early sun, and deeper and deeper below it as it rose into its zenith, and aslant of it as it declined, and on a level with it again as it departed. Sturdy digging, and shovelling, and carrying away, in carts, barrows, and baskets, went on without intermission, by night and by day; but, it was night for the second time when they found the dirty heap of rubbish that had been the foreigner, before his head had been shivered to atoms, like so much glass, by the great beam that lay upon him, crushing him.

Still, they had not come upon Flintwinch yet; so, the sturdy digging and shovelling and carrying away went on without intermission by night and by day. It got about that the old house had had famous cellarage (which indeed was true), and that Flintwinch had been in a cellar at the moment, or had had time to escape into one, and that he was safe under its strong arch, and even that he had been heard to cry, in hollow, subterranean, suffocated notes, "Here I am!" At the opposite extremity of the town it was even known that the excavators had been able to open a communication with him through a pipe, and that he had received both soup and brandy by that channel, and that he had said with admirable fortitude that he was All right, my lads, with the exception of his collar-bone. But, the digging and shovelling and carrying away went on without intermission, until the ruins were all dug out, and the cellars opened to the light; and still no Flintwinch, living or dead, all right or all wrong, had been turned up by pick or spade.

It began, then, to be perceived that Flintwinch had not been there at the time of the fall; and it began then to be perceived that he had been rather busy elsewhere, converting securities into as much money as could be got for them on the shortest notice, and turning to his own exclusive account, his authority to act for the Firm. Affery, remembering that the clever one had said he would explain himself

further in four-and-twenty hours' time, determined for her part that his taking himself off within that period with all he could get, was the final satisfactory sum and substance of his promised explanation; but, she held her peace, devoutly thankful to be quit of him. As it seemed reasonable to conclude that a man who had never been buried could not be unburied, the diggers gave him up when their task was done, and did not dig down for him into the depths of the earth.

This was taken in ill part by a great many people, who persisted in believing that Flintwinch was lying somewhere among the London geological formations. Nor was their belief much shaken by repeated intelligence which came over in course of time, that an old man, who wore the tie of his neckcloth under one ear, and who was very well known to be an Englishman, consorted with the Dutchmen on the quaint banks of the canals at the Hague, and in the drinking-shops of Amsterdam, under the style and designation of Mynheer von Flyntevynge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOING.

ARTHUR continuing to lie very ill in the Marshalsea, and Mr. Rugg desecrating no break in the legal sky affording a hope of his enlargement, Mr. Pancks suffered desperately from self-reproaches. If it had not been for those infallible figures which proved that Arthur, instead of pining in imprisonment, ought to be promenading in a carriage and pair, and that Mr. Pancks, instead of being restricted to his clerky wages, ought to have from three to five thousand pounds of his own, at his immediate disposal, that unhappy arithmetician would probably have taken to his bed, and there have made one of the many obscure persons who turned their faces to the wall and died, as a last sacrifice to the late Mr. Merdle's greatness. Solely supported by his unimpugnable calculations, Mr. Pancks led an unhappy and restless life; constantly carrying his figures about with him in his hat, and not only going over them himself on every possible occasion, but entreating every human being he could lay hold of to go over them with him, and observe what a clear case it was. Down in Bleeding Heart Yard, there was scarcely an inhabitant of any note to whom Mr. Pancks had not imparted his demonstration, and, as figures are catching, a kind of cyphering measles broke out in that locality, under the influence of which the whole Yard was light-headed.

The more restless Mr. Pancks grew in his mind, the more impatient he became of the Patriarch. In their later conferences, his snorting had assumed an irritable sound which boded the Patriarch no

good; likewise, Mr. Pancks had on several occasions looked harder at the Patriarchal bumps than was quite reconcileable with the fact of his not being a painter, or a peruke-maker, in search of the living model.

However, he had steamed in and out of his little back Dock, according as he was wanted or not wanted in the Patriarchal presence, and business had gone on in its customary course. Bleeding Heart Yard had been harrowed by Mr. Pancks, and cropped by Mr. Casby, at the regular seasons; Mr. Pancks had taken all the drudgery and all the dirt of the business as his share; Mr. Casby had taken all the profits, all the ethereal vapor, and all the moonshine, as *his* share; and, in the form of words which that benevolent beamer generally employed on Saturday evenings, when he twirled his fat thumbs after striking the week's balance, "everything had been satisfactory to all parties—all parties—satisfactory, sir, to all parties."

The Dock of the Steam-Tug, Pancks, had a leaden roof, which, frying in the very hot sunshine, may have heated the vessel. Be that as it may, one glowing Saturday evening, on being hailed by the lumbering bottle-green ship, the Tug instantly came working out of the Dock in a highly heated condition.

"Mr. Pancks," was the Patriarchal remark, "you have been remiss, you have been remiss, sir."

"What do you mean by that?" was the short rejoinder.

The Patriarchal state, always a state of calmness and composure, was so particularly serene that evening as to be provoking. Everybody else within the bills of mortality was hot; but, the Patriarch was perfectly cool. Everybody was thirsty, and the Patriarch was drinking. There was a fragrance of limes or lemons about him; and he had made a drink of golden sherry, which shone in a large tumbler, as if he were drinking the evening sunshine. This was bad, but not the worst. The worst was, that with his big blue eyes, and his polished head, and his long white hair, and his bottle-green legs stretched out before him, terminating in his easy shoes easily crossed at the instep, he had a radiant appearance of having in his extensive benevolence made the drink for the human species, while he himself wanted nothing but his own milk of human kindness.

Wherefore, Mr. Pancks said, "What do you mean by that?" and put his hair up with both hands, in a highly portentous manner.

"I mean, Mr. Pancks, that you must be sharper with the people, sharper with the people, much sharper with the people, sir. You don't squeeze them. You don't squeeze them. Your receipts are not up to the mark. You must squeeze them, sir, or our connection will not continue to be as satisfactory as I could wish it to be, to all parties. All parties.

"*Don't* I squeeze 'em?" retorted Mr. Pancks. "What else am I made for?"

"You are made for nothing else, Mr. Pancks. You are made to do your duty, but you don't do your duty. You are paid to squeeze, and you must squeeze to pay." The Patriarch so much surprised himself by this brilliant turn, after Doctor Johnson, which he had not in the least expected or intended, that he laughed aloud; and repeated with

great satisfaction, as he twirled his thumbs and nodded at his youthful portrait, "Paid to squeeze, sir, and must squeeze to pay."

"Oh!" said Pancks. "Anything more?"

"Yes, sir, yes, sir. Something more. You will please, Mr. Pancks, to squeeze the Yard again, the first thing on Monday morning."

"Oh!" said Pancks. "An't that too soon? I squeezed it dry to-day."

"Nonsense, sir. Not near the mark, not near the mark."

"Oh!" said Pancks, watching him as he benevolently gulped down a good draught of his mixture. "Anything more?"

"Yes, sir, yes, sir, something more. I am not at all pleased, Mr. Pancks, with my daughter; not at all pleased. Besides calling much too often to inquire for Mrs. Clennam, Mrs. Clennam, who is not just now in circumstances that are by any means calculated to—to be satisfactory to all parties, she goes, Mr. Pancks, unless I am much deceived, to inquire for Mr. Clennam in jail. In jail."

"He's laid up, you know," said Pancks. "Perhaps it's kind."

"Pooh, pooh, Mr. Pancks. She has nothing to do with that, nothing to do with that. I can't allow it. Let him pay his debts and come out, come out; pay his debts, and come out."

Although Mr. Pancks's hair was standing up like strong wire, he gave it another double-handed impulse in the perpendicular direction, and smiled at his proprietor in a most hideous manner.

"You will please to mention to my daughter, Mr. Pancks, that I can't allow it, can't allow it," said the Patriarch, blandly.

"Oh!" said Pancks. "You couldn't mention it yourself?"

"No sir, no; you are paid to mention it," the blundering old booby could not resist the temptation of trying it again, "and you must mention it to pay, mention it to pay."

"Oh!" said Pancks. "Anything more?"

"Yes, sir. It appears to me, Mr. Pancks, that you yourself are too often and too much in that direction, that direction. I recommend you, Mr. Pancks, to dismiss from your attention both your own losses and other people's losses, and to mind your business, mind your business."

Mr. Pancks acknowledged this recommendation with such an extraordinarily abrupt, short, and loud utterance of the monosyllable "Oh!" that even the unwieldy Patriarch moved his blue eyes in something of a hurry, to look at him. Mr. Pancks, with a sniff of corresponding intensity, then added, "Anything more?"

"Not at present, sir, not at present. I am going," said the Patriarch, finishing his mixture, and rising with an amiable air, "to take a little stroll, little stroll. Perhaps I shall find you here when I come back. If not sir, duty, duty; squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, on Monday; squeeze on Monday!"

Mr. Pancks, after another stiffening of his hair, looked on at the Patriarchal assumption of the broad-brimmed hat, with a momentary appearance of indecision contending with a sense of injury. He was also hotter than at first, and breathed harder. But, he suffered Mr. Casby to go out, without offering any further remark, and then took a peep at him over the little green window-blinds. "I thought so," he observed. "I knew where you were bound to.

Good!" He then steamed back to his Dock, put it carefully in order, took down his hat, looked round the Dock, said "Good bye!" and puffed away on his own account. He steered straight for Mrs. Plornish's end of Bleeding Heart Yard, and arrived there, at the top of the steps, hotter than ever.

At the top of the steps, resisting Mrs. Plornish's invitations to come and sit along with father in Happy Cottage—which to his relief were not so numerous as they would have been on any other night than Saturday, when the connexion who so gallantly supported the business with everything but money gave their orders freely—at the top of the steps, Mr. Pancks remained until he beheld the Patriarch, who always entered the Yard at the other end, slowly advancing, beaming, and surrounded by suitors. Then Mr. Pancks descended and bore down upon him, with his utmost pressure of steam on.

The Patriarch, approaching with his usual benignity, was surprised to see Mr. Pancks, but supposed him to have been stimulated to an immediate squeeze instead of postponing that operation until Monday. The population of the Yard were astonished at the meeting, for the two powers had never been seen there together, within the memory of the oldest Bleeding Heart. But, they were overcome by unutterable amazement, when Mr. Pancks, going close up to the most venerable of men, and halting in front of the bottle-green waistcoat, made a trigger of his right thumb and forefinger, applied the same to the brim of the broad-brimmed hat, and, with singular smartness and precision, shot it off the polished head as if it had been a large marble.

Having taken this little liberty with the Patriarchal person, Mr. Pancks further astounded and attracted the Bleeding Hearts by saying in an audible voice, "Now, you sugary swindler, I mean to have it out with you!"

Mr. Pancks and the Patriarch were instantly the centre of a press, all eyes and ears; windows were thrown open, and doorsteps were thronged.

"What do you pretend to be," said Mr. Pancks. "What's your moral game? What do you go in for? Benevolence, an't it? You benevolent!" Here Mr. Pancks, apparently without the intention of hitting him, but merely to relieve his mind and expend his superfluous power in wholesome exercise, aimed a blow at the bumpy head, which the bumpy head ducked to avoid. This singular performance was repeated, to the ever increasing admiration of the spectators, at the end of every succeeding article of Mr. Panck's oration.

"I have discharged myself from your service," said Pancks, "that I may tell you what you are. You're one of a lot of impostors that are the worst lot of all the lots to be met with. Speaking as a sufferer by both, I don't know that I wouldn't as soon have the Merdle lot as your lot. You're a driver in disguise, a screwdriver by deputy, a wringer, and squeezer, and shaver by substitute. You're a philanthropic sneak. You're a shabby deceiver!"

(The repetition of the performance at this point was received with a burst of laughter.)

"Ask these good people who's the hard man here. They'll tell you Pancks, I believe."

This was confirmed with cries of "Certainly," and "Hear!"

"But I tell you, good people—Casby! This mound of meekness, this lump of love, this bottle-green smiler, this is your driver!" said Pancks. "If you want to see the man who would flay you alive—here he is! Don't look for him in me, at thirty shillings a-week, but look for him in Casby, at I don't know how much a-year!"

"Good!" cried several voices. "Hear Mr. Pancks!"

"Hear Mr. Pancks?" cried that gentleman (after repeating the popular performance), "Yes, I should think so! It's almost time to hear Mr. Pancks. Mr. Pancks has come down into the Yard to-night, on purpose that you should hear him. Pancks is only the Works; but here's the Winder!"

The audience would have gone over to Mr. Pancks, as one man, woman, and child, but for the long, grey, silken locks, and the broad-brimmed hat.

"Here's the Stop," said Pancks, "that sets the tune to be ground. And there is but one tune, and its name is Grind, Grind, Grind! Here's the Proprietor, and here's his Grubber. Why, good people, when he comes smoothly spinning through the Yard to-night, like a slow-going benevolent Humming-Top, and when you come about him with your complaints of the Grubber, you don't know what a cheat the Proprietor is! What do you think of his showing himself to-night, that I may have all the blame on Monday? What do you think of his having had me over the coals this very evening, because I don't squeeze you enough? What do you think of my being, at the present moment, under special orders to squeeze you dry on Monday?"

The reply was given in a murmur of "Shame!" and "Shabby!"

"Shabby?" snorted Pancks. "Yes, I should think so! The lot that your Casby belongs to, is the shabbiest of all the lots. Setting their Grubbers on, at a wretched pittance, to do what they're ashamed and afraid to do and pretend not to do, but what they will have done, or give a man no rest! Imposing on you to give their Grubbers nothing but blame, and to give them nothing but credit! Why, the worst-looking cheat in all this town who gets the value of eighteen-pence under false pretences, an't half such a cheat as this sign-post of The Casby's Head here!"

Cries of "That's true!" and "No more he an't!"

"And see what you get of these fellows, besides," said Pancks. "See what more you get of these precious Humming-Tops, revolving among you with such smoothness that you've no idea of the pattern painted on 'em, or the little window in 'em! I wish to call your attention to myself for a moment. I an't an agreeable style of chap, I know that very well."

The auditory were divided on this point; its more uncompromising members crying, "No you are not," and its politer materials, "Yes, you are."

"I am, in general," said Mr. Pancks, "a dry, uncomfortable, dreary Plodder and Grubber. That's your humble servant. There's his full-length portrait, painted by himself and presented to you, warranted a likeness! But what's a man to be, with such a man as this for his

Proprietor? What can be expected of him? Did anybody ever find boiled mutton and caper-sauce growing in a cocoa-nut?"

None of the Bleeding Hearts ever had, it was clear from the alacrity of their response.

"Well," said Mr. Pancks, "and neither will you find in Grubbers like myself, under Proprietors like this, pleasant qualities. I've been a Grubber from a boy. What has my life been? Fag and grind, fag and grind, turn the wheel, turn the wheel! I haven't been agreeable to myself, and I haven't been likely to be agreeable to anybody else. If I was a shilling a week less useful in ten years' time, this impostor would give me a shilling a week less; if as useful a man could be got at sixpence cheaper, he would be taken in my place at sixpence cheaper. Bargain and sale, bless you! Fixed principles! It is a mighty fine sign-post, is The Casby's Head," said Mr. Pancks, surveying it with anything rather than admiration; "but the real name of the House is The Sham's Arms. Its motto is, Keep the Grubber always at it. Is any gentleman present," said Mr. Pancks, breaking off and looking round, "acquainted with the English Grammar?"

Bleeding Heart Yard was shy of claiming that acquaintance.

"It's no matter," said Mr. Pancks. "I merely wish to remark that the task this Proprietor has set me, has been, never to leave off conjugating the Imperative Mood Present Tense of the verb To keep always at it. Keep thou always at it. Let him keep always at it. Keep we or do we keep always at it. Keep ye or do ye or you keep always at it. Let them keep always at it. Here is your benevolent Patriarch of a Casby, and there is his golden rule. He is uncommonly improving to look at, and I am not at all so. He is as sweet as honey, and I am as dull as ditch-water. He provides the pitch, and I handle it, and it sticks to me. Now," said Mr. Pancks, closing upon his late Proprietor again, from whom he had withdrawn a little for the better display of him to the Yard; "as I am not accustomed to speak in public, and as I have made a rather lengthy speech, all circumstances considered, I shall bring my observations to a close by requesting you to get out of this."

The Last of the Patriarchs had been so seized by assault, and required so much room to catch an idea in, and so much more room to turn it in, that he had not a word to offer in reply. He appeared to be meditating some Patriarchal way out of his delicate position, when Mr. Pancks, once more suddenly applying the trigger to his hat, shot it off again with his former dexterity. On the preceding occasion, one or two of the Bleeding Heart Yarders had obsequiously picked it up and handed it to its owner; but, Mr. Pancks had now so far impressed his audience, that the Patriarch had to turn and stoop for it himself.

Quick as lightning, Mr. Pancks, who, for some moments, had had his right hand in his coat pocket, whipped out a pair of shears, swooped upon the Patriarch behind, and snipped off short, the sacred locks that flowed upon his shoulders. In a paroxysm of animosity and rapidity, Mr. Pancks then caught the broad-brimmed hat out of the astounded Patriarch's hand, cut it down into a mere stewpan, and fixed it on the Patriarch's head.

Before the frightful results of this desperate action, Mr. Pancks himself recoiled in consternation. A bare-polled, goggle-eyed, big-headed, lumbering personage stood staring at him, not in the least impressive, not in the least venerable, who seemed to have started out of the earth to ask what was become of Casby. After staring at this phantom in return, in silent awe, Mr. Pancks threw down his shears, and fled for a place of hiding, where he might lie sheltered from the consequences of his crime. Mr. Pancks deemed it prudent to use all possible dispatch in making off, though he was pursued by nothing but the sound of laughter in Bleeding Heart Yard, rippling through the air, and making it ring again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOING !

THE changes of a fevered room are slow and fluctuating ; but, the changes of the fevered world are rapid and irrevocable.

It was Little Dorrit's lot to wait upon both kinds of change. The Marshalsea walls, during a portion of every day, again embraced her in their shadows as their child while she thought for Clennam, worked for him, watched him, and only left him still to devote her utmost love and care to him. Her part in the life outside the gate urged its pressing claims upon her, too, and her patience untiringly responded to them. Here was Fanny, proud, fitful, whimsical, further advanced in that disqualified state for going into society which had so much fretted her on the evening of the tortoise-shell knife, resolved always to want comfort, resolved not to be comforted, resolved to be deeply wronged, and resolved that nobody should have the audacity to think her so. Here was her brother, a weak, proud, tipsy, young old man, shaking from head to foot, talking as indistinctly as if some of the money he plumed himself upon had got into his mouth and couldn't be got out, unable to walk alone in any act of his life, and patronising the sister whom he selfishly loved (he always had that negative merit, ill-starred and ill-launched Tip !), because he suffered her to lead him. Here was Mrs. Merdle in gauzy mourning—the original cap whereof had possibly been rent to pieces in a fit of grief, but had certainly yielded to a highly becoming article from the Parisian market—warring with Fanny foot to foot, and breasting her with her desolate bosom every hour in the day. Here was poor Mr. Sparkler, not knowing how to keep the peace between them, but humbly inclining to the opinion that they could do no better than agree that they were both remarkably fine women, and that there was no nonsense about either of them—for which gentle recommendation they united in falling upon him frightfully. Then, too, here was Mrs. General, got home from foreign parts, sending a Prune and a

Prism by post every other day, demanding a new Testimonial by way of recommendation to some vacant appointment or other. Of which remarkable gentlewoman it may be finally observed, that there surely never was a gentlewoman of whose transcendent fitness for any vacant appointment on the face of this earth, so many people were (as the warmth of her Testimonials evinced) so perfectly satisfied—or who was so very unfortunate in having a large circle of ardent and distinguished admirers, who never themselves happened to want her, in any capacity.

On the first crash of the eminent Mr. Merdle's decease, many important persons had been unable to determine whether they should cut Mrs. Merdle, or comfort her. As it seemed, however, essential to the strength of their own case that they should admit her to have been cruelly deceived, they graciously made the admission and continued to know her. It followed that Mrs. Merdle, as a woman of fashion and good breeding, who had been sacrificed to the wiles of a vulgar barbarian (for, Mr. Merdle was found out, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, the moment he was found out in his pocket), must be actively championed by her order, for her order's sake. She returned this fealty, by causing it to be understood that she was even more incensed against the felonious shade of the deceased than anybody else was; thus on the whole she came out of her furnace like a wise woman, and did exceedingly well.

Mr. Sparkler's lordship was fortunately one of those shelves on which a gentleman is considered to be put away for life, unless there should be reasons for hoisting him up with the Barnacle crane to a more lucrative height. That patriotic servant accordingly stuck to his colors (the Standard of four Quarterings), and was a perfect Nelson in respect of nailing them to the mast. On the profits of his intrepidity, Mrs. Sparkler and Mrs. Merdle, inhabiting different floors of the genteel little temple of inconvenience to which the smell of the day before yesterday's soup and coach-horses was as constant as Death to man, arrayed themselves to fight it out in the lists of Society, sworn rivals. And Little Dorrit, seeing all these things as they developed themselves, could not but wonder, anxiously, into what back-corner of the genteel establishment Fanny's children would be poked by-and-bye, and who would take care of those unborn little victims.

Arthur being far too ill to be spoken with on subjects of emotion or anxiety, and his recovery greatly depending on the repose into which his weakness could be hushed, Little Dorrit's sole reliance during this heavy period was on Mr. Meagles. He was still abroad; but, she had written to him, through his daughter, immediately after first seeing Arthur in the Marshalsea, and since, confiding her uneasiness to him on the points on which she was most anxious, but especially on one. To that one, the continued absence of Mr. Meagles abroad, instead of his comforting presence in the Marshalsea, was referable.

Without disclosing the precise nature of the documents that had fallen into Rigaud's hands, Little Dorrit had confided the general outline of that story to Mr. Meagles, to whom she had also recounted his fate. The old cautious habits of the scales and scoop at once showed Mr. Meagles the importance of recovering the original papers;

wherefore, he wrote back to Little Dorrit, strongly confirming her in the solicitude she expressed on that head, and adding that he would not come over to England "without making some attempt to trace them out."

By this time, Mr. Henry Gowan had made up his mind that it would be agreeable to him not to know the Meagleses. He was so considerate as to lay no injunctions on his wife in that particular; but, he mentioned to Mr. Meagles that personally they did not appear to him to get on together, and that he thought it would be a good thing if—politely, and without any scene, or anything of that sort—they agreed that they were the best fellows in the world, but were best apart. Poor Mr. Meagles, who was already sensible that he did not advance his daughter's happiness by being constantly slighted in her presence, said "Good, Henry! You are my Pet's husband; you have displaced me, in the course of nature; if you wish it, good!" This arrangement involved the contingent advantage, which perhaps Henry Gowan had not foreseen, that both Mr. and Mrs. Meagles were more liberal than before to their daughter, when their communication was only with her and her young child; and that his high spirit found itself better provided with money, without being under the degrading necessity of knowing whence it came.

Mr. Meagles, at such a period, naturally seized an occupation with great ardour. He knew from his daughter the various towns which Rigaud had been haunting, and the various hotels at which he had been living for some time back. The occupation he set himself was, to visit these with all discretion and speed, and, in the event of finding anywhere that he had left a bill unpaid, and a box or parcel behind, to pay such bill, and bring away such box or parcel.

With no other attendant than Mother, Mr. Meagles went upon this pilgrimage, and encountered a number of adventures. Not the least of his difficulties was, that he never knew what was said to him, and that he pursued his inquiries among people who never knew what he said to them. Still, with an unshaken confidence that the English tongue was somehow the mother tongue of the whole world, only the people were too stupid to know it, Mr. Meagles harangued inn-keepers in the most voluble manner, entered into loud explanations of the most complicated sort, and utterly renounced replies in the native language of the respondents, on the ground that they were "all bosh." Sometimes interpreters were called in; whom Mr. Meagles addressed in such idiomatic terms of speech, as instantly to extinguish and shut up—which made the matter worse. On a balance of the account, however, it may be doubted whether he lost much; for, although he found no property, he found so many debts and various associations of discredit with the proper name which was the only word he made intelligible, that he was almost everywhere overwhelmed with injurious accusations. On no fewer than four occasions, the police were called in to receive denunciations of Mr. Meagles as a Knight of Industry, a good-for-nothing, and a thief; all of which opprobrious language he bore with the best temper (having no idea what it meant), and was in the most ignominious manner escorted to steamboats and public carriages, to be got rid of, talking all the while,

like a cheerful and fluent Briton as he was, with Mother under his arm.

But, in his own tongue, and in his own head, Mr. Meagles was a clear, shrewd, persevering man. When he had "worked round," as he called it, to Paris in his pilgrimage, and had wholly failed in it so far, he was not disheartened. "The nearer to England I follow him, you see, Mother," argued Mr. Meagles, "the nearer I am likely to come to the papers, whether they turn up or no. Because it is only reasonable to conclude, that he would deposit them somewhere where they would be safe from people over in England, and where they would yet be accessible to himself, don't you see."

At Paris, Mr. Meagles found a letter from Little Dorrit, lying waiting for him; in which she mentioned that she had been able to talk for a minute or two with Mr. Clennam, about this man who was no more; and that when she told Mr. Clennam that his friend Mr. Meagles who was on his way to see him had an interest in ascertaining something about the man if he could, he had asked her to tell Mr. Meagles that he had been known to Miss Wade, then living in such a street at Calais. "Oho!" said Mr. Meagles.

As soon afterwards as might be, in those Diligence days, Mr. Meagles rang the cracked bell at the cracked gate, and it jarred open, and the peasant-woman stood in the dark doorway, saying, "Ice-say! Seer! Who?" In acknowledgment of whose address, Mr. Meagles murmured to himself that there was some sense about these Calais people, who really did know something of what you and themselves were up to; and returned, "Miss Wade, my dear." He was then shown into the presence of Miss Wade.

"It's some time since we met," said Mr. Meagles, clearing his throat; "I hope you have been pretty well, Miss Wade?"

Without hoping that he or anybody else had been pretty well, Miss Wade asked him to what she was indebted for the honor of seeing him again? Mr. Meagles, in the meanwhile, glanced all round the room, without observing anything in the shape of a box.

"Why, the truth is, Miss Wade," said Mr. Meagles, in a comfortable, managing, not to say coaxing, voice, "it is possible that you may be able to throw a light upon a little something that is at present dark. Any unpleasant byegones between us, are byegones, I hope. Can't be helped now. You recollect my daughter? Times change so! A mother!"

In his innocence, Mr. Meagles could not have struck a worse key-note. He paused for any expression of interest, but paused in vain.

"That is not the subject you wished to enter on?" she said, after a cold silence.

"No, no," returned Mr. Meagles, "No. I thought your good nature might——"

"I thought you knew," she interrupted, with a smile, "that my good nature is not to be calculated upon."

"Don't say so," said Mr. Meagles; "you do yourself an injustice. However, to come to the point." For he was sensible of having gained nothing by approaching it in a roundabout way. "I have heard from

my friend Clennam, who, you will be sorry to hear, has been and still is very ill——”

He paused again, and again she was silent.

“—that you had some knowledge of one Blandois, lately killed in London by a violent accident. Now, don’t mistake me! I know it was a slight knowledge,” said Mr. Meagles, dexterously forestalling an angry interruption which he saw about to break. “I am fully aware of that. It was a slight knowledge, I know. But, the question is,” Mr. Meagles’s voice here became comfortable again, “did he, on his way to England last time, leave a box of papers, or a bundle of papers, or some papers or other in some receptacle or other—any papers—with you: begging you to allow him to leave them here for a short time, until he wanted them?”

“The question is?” she repeated. “Whose question is?”

“Mine,” said Mr. Meagles. “And not only mine, but Clennam’s question, and other people’s question. Now, I am sure,” continued Mr. Meagles, whose heart was overflowing with Pet, “that you can’t have any unkind feeling towards my daughter; it’s impossible. Well! It’s her question, too; being one in which a particular friend of hers is nearly interested. So here I am, frankly to say that *is* the question, and to ask, Now, did he?”

“Upon my word,” she returned, “I seem to be a mark for everybody who knew anything of a man I once in my life hired, and paid, and dismissed, to aim their questions at!”

“Now, don’t,” remonstrated Mr. Meagles, “don’t! Don’t take offence, because it’s the plainest question in the world, and might be asked of anyone. The documents I refer to were not his own, were wrongfully obtained, might at some time or other be troublesome to an innocent person to have in keeping, and are sought by the people to whom they really belong. He passed through Calais going to London, and there were reasons why he should not take them with him then, why he should wish to be able to put his hand upon them readily, and why he should distrust leaving them with people of his own sort. Did he leave them here? I declare, if I knew how to avoid giving you offence, I would take any pains to do it. I put the question personally, but there’s nothing personal in it. I might put it to any one; I have put it already to many people. Did he leave them here? Did he leave anything here?”

“No.”

“Then unfortunately, Miss Wade, you know nothing about them?”

“I know nothing about them. I have now answered your unaccountable question. He did not leave them here, and I know nothing about them.”

“There!” said Mr. Meagles, rising. “I am sorry for it; that’s over; and I hope there is not much harm done.—Tattycoram well, Miss Wade?”

“Harriet well? Oh yes!”

“I have put my foot in it again,” said Mr. Meagles, thus corrected. “I can’t keep my foot out of it, here, it seems. Perhaps, if I had thought twice about it, I might never have given her the jingling name. But, when one means to be good-natured and sportive with

young people, one doesn't think twice. Her old friend leaves a kind word for her, Miss Wade, if you should think proper to deliver it."

She said nothing as to that; and Mr. Meagles, taking his honest face out of the dull room, where it shone like a sun, took it to the Hotel where he had left Mrs. Meagles, and where he made the Report: "Beaten, Mother; no effects!" He took it next to the London Steam Packet, which sailed in the night; and next to the Marshalsea.

The faithful John was on duty, when Father and Mother Meagles presented themselves at the wicket towards nightfall. Miss Dorrit was not there then, he said; but, she had been there in the morning, and invariably came in the evening. Mr. Clennam was slowly mending; and Maggy and Mrs. Plornish and Mr. Baptist took care of him by turns. Miss Dorrit was sure to come back that evening before the bell rang. There was the room the Marshal had lent her, up-stairs, in which they could wait for her, if they pleased. Mistrustful that it might be hazardous to Arthur to see him without preparation, Mr. Meagles accepted the offer; and they were left shut up in the room, looking down through its barred window into the jail.

The cramped area of the prison had such an effect on Mrs. Meagles that she began to weep, and such an effect on Mr. Meagles that he began to gasp for air. He was walking up and down the room, panting, and making himself worse by laboriously fanning himself with his handkerchief, when he turned towards the opening door.

"Eh? Good Gracious!" said Mr. Meagles, "this is not Miss Dorrit! Why, Mother, look! Tattycoram!"

No other. And in Tattycoram's arms was an iron box some two feet square. Such a box had Affery Flintwinch seen in the first of her dreams, going out of the old house in the dead of the night, under Double's arm. This, Tattycoram put on the ground at her old master's feet; this, Tattycoram fell on her knees by, and beat her hands upon, crying half in exultation and half in despair, half in laughter and half in tears, "Pardon, dear Master, take me back dear Mistress, here it is!"

"Tatty!" exclaimed Mr. Meagles.

"What you wanted!" said Tattycoram. "Here it is! I was put in the next room not to see you. I heard you ask her about it, I heard her say she hadn't got it, I was there when he left it, and I took it at bedtime and brought it away. Here it is!"

"Why, my girl," cried Mr. Meagles, more breathless than before, "how did you come over?"

"I came in the boat with you. I was sitting wrapped up at the other end. When you took a coach at the wharf, I took another coach, and followed you here. She never would have given it up, after what you had said to her about its being wanted; she would sooner have sunk it in the sea, or burnt it. But, here it is!"

The glow and rapture that the girl was in, with her "Here it is!"

"She never wanted it to be left, I must say that for her; but he left it, and I know well that after what you said, and after her denying it, she never would have given it up. But here it is! Dear Master,

dear Mistress, take me back again, and give me back the dear old name! Let this intercede for me. Here it is!"

Father and Mother Meagles never deserved their names better, than when they took the headstrong foundling-girl into their protection again.

"Oh! I have been so wretched," cried Tattycoram, weeping much more, after that, than before; "always so unhappy, and so repentant! I was afraid of her, from the first time I ever saw her. I knew she had got a power over me, through understanding what was bad in me, so well. It was a madness in me, and she could raise it whenever she liked. I used to think, when I got into that state, that people were all against me because of my first beginning; and the kinder they were to me, the worse fault I found in them. I made it out that they triumphed above me, and that they wanted to make me envy them, when I know—when I even knew then, if I would—that they never thought of such a thing. And my beautiful young mistress not so happy as she ought to have been, and I gone away from her! Such a brute and wretch as she must think me! But you'll say a word to her for me, and ask her to be as forgiving as you two are? For, I am not so bad as I was," pleaded Tattycoram; "I am bad enough, but not so bad as I was, indeed. I have had Miss Wade before me all this time, as if it was my own self grown ripe—turning everything the wrong way, and twisting all good into evil. I have had her before me all this time, finding no pleasure in anything but in keeping me as miserable, suspicious, and tormenting as herself. Not that she had much to do, to do that," cried Tattycoram, in a closing great burst of distress, "for I was as bad as bad could be. I only mean to say, that, after what I have gone through, I hope I shall never be quite so bad again, and that I shall get better by very slow degrees. I'll try very hard. I won't stop at five and twenty, sir. I'll count five and twenty hundred, five and twenty thousand!"

Another opening of the door, and Tattycoram subsided, and Little Dorrit came in, and Mr. Meagles with pride and joy produced the box, and her gentle face was lighted up with grateful happiness and joy. The secret was safe now! She could keep her own part of it from him; he should never know of her loss; in time to come, he should know all that was of import to himself; but, he should never know what concerned her, only. That was all past, all forgiven, all forgotten.

"Now, my dear Miss Dorrit," said Mr. Meagles; "I am a man of business—or at least was—and I am going to take my measures, promptly, in that character. Had I better see Arthur to-night?"

"I think not to-night. I will go to his room and ascertain how he is. But I think it will be better not to see him to-night."

"I am much of your opinion, my dear," said Mr. Meagles, "and therefore I have not been any nearer to him than this dismal room. Then I shall probably not see him for some little time to come. But I'll explain what I mean when you come back."

She left the room. Mr. Meagles, looking through the bars of the window, saw her pass out of the Lodge below him into the prison-yard. He said gently, "Tattycoram, come to me a moment, my good girl."

She went up to the window.

"You see that young lady who was here just now—that little, quiet, fragile figure passing along there, Tatty? Look. The people stand out of the way to let her go by. The men—see the poor, shabby fellows—pull off their hats to her quite politely, and now she glides in at that doorway. See her, Tattycoram?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have heard tell, Tatty, that she was once regularly called the child of this place. She was born here, and lived here many years. I can't breathe here. A doleful place, to be born and bred in, Tattycoram?"

"Yes indeed, sir!"

"If she had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her, she would have led an irritable and probably an useless existence. Yet I have heard tell, Tattycoram, that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service. Shall I tell you what I consider those eyes of hers that were here just now, to have always looked at, to get that expression?"

"Yes, if you please, sir."

"Duty, Tattycoram. Begin it early, and do it well; and there is no antecedent to it, in any origin or station, that will tell against us with the Almighty, or with ourselves."

They remained at the window, Mother joining them and pitying the prisoners, until she was seen coming back. She was soon in the room, and recommended that Arthur, whom she had left calm and composed, should not be visited that night.

"Good!" said Mr. Meagles, cheerily. "I have not a doubt that's best. I shall trust my remembrances then, my sweet nurse, in your hands, and I well know they couldn't be in better. I am off again to-morrow morning."

Little Dorrit, surprised, asked him where?

"My dear," said Mr. Meagles, "I can't live without breathing. This place has taken my breath away, and I shall never get it back again until Arthur is out of this place."

"How is that a reason for going off again to-morrow morning?"

"You shall understand," said Mr. Meagles. "To-night we three will put up at a City Hotel. To-morrow morning, Mother and Tattycoram will go down to Twickenham, where Mrs. Tickit, sitting attended by Dr. Buchan in the parlor-window, will think them a couple of ghosts; and I shall go abroad again for Doyce. We must have Dan here. Now, I tell you my love, it's of no use writing and planning and conditionally speculating, upon this and that and the other, at uncertain intervals and distances; we must have Doyce here. I devote myself, at daybreak to-morrow morning, to bringing Doyce here. It's nothing to me to go and find him. I'm an old traveller, and all foreign languages and customs are alike to me—I never understand anything about any of 'em. Therefore I can't be put to any inconvenience. Go at once I must, it stands to reason; because I can't live, without breathing freely; and I can't breathe freely, until Arthur is out of this Marshalsea. I am stifled at the present

moment, and have scarcely breath enough to say this much, and to carry this precious box down-stairs for you."

They got into the street as the bell began to ring, Mr. Meagles carrying the box. Little Dorrit had no conveyance there: which rather surprised him. He called a coach for her, and she got into it, and he placed the box beside her when she was seated. In her joy and gratitude she kissed his hand.

"I don't like that, my dear," said Mr. Meagles. "It goes against my feeling of what's right, that *you* should do homage to *me*—at the Marshalsea Gate."

She bent forward, and kissed his cheek.

"You remind me of the days," said Mr. Meagles, suddenly drooping—"but she's very fond of him, and hides his faults, and thinks that no one sees them—and he certainly is well connected, and of a very good family!"

It was the only comfort he had in the loss of his daughter, and if he made the most of it, who could blame him?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GONE.

ON a healthy autumn day, the Marshalsea prisoner, weak but otherwise restored, sat listening to a voice that read to him. On a healthy autumn day; when the golden fields had been reaped and ploughed again, when the summer fruits had ripened and waned, when the green perspectives of hops had been laid low by the busy pickers, when the apples clustering in the orchards were russet, and the berries of the mountain ash were crimson among the yellowing foliage. Already in the woods, glimpses of the hardy winter that was coming, were to be caught through unaccustomed openings among the boughs where the prospect shone defined and clear, free from the bloom of the drowsy summer weather, which had rested on it as the bloom lies on the plum. So, from the sea-shore the ocean was no longer to be seen lying asleep in the heat, but its thousand sparkling eyes were open, and its whole breadth was in joyful animation, from the cool sand on the beach to the little sails on the horizon, drifting away like autumn-tinted leaves that had drifted from the trees.

Changeless and barren, looking ignorantly at all the seasons with its fixed, pinched face of poverty and care, the prison had not a touch of any of these beauties on it. Blossom what would, its bricks and bars bore uniformly the same dead crop. Yet Clennam, listening to the voice as it read to him, heard in it all that great Nature was doing, heard in it all the soothing songs she sings to man. At no Mother's knee but her's, had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises, on playful fancies, on the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination; on the oaks of retreat

from blighting winds, that have the germs of their strong roots in nursery acorns. But, in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things, and echoes of every merciful and loving whisper that had ever stolen to him in his life.

When the voice stopped, he put his hand over his eyes, murmuring that the light was strong upon them.

Little Dorrit put the book by, and presently arose quietly to shade the window. Maggy sat at her needlework in her old place. The light softened, Little Dorrit brought her chair closer to his side.

"This will soon be over now, dear Mr. Clennam. Not only are Mr. Doyce's letters to you so full of friendship and encouragement, but Mr. Rugg says his letters to him are so full of help, and that everybody (now a little anger is past) is so considerate, and speaks so well of you, that it will soon be over now."

"Dear girl. Dear heart. Good angel!"

"You praise me far too much. And yet it is such an exquisite pleasure to me to hear you speak so feelingly, and to—and to see," said Little Dorrit, raising her eyes to his, "how deeply you mean it, that I cannot say Don't."

He lifted her hand to his lips.

"You have been here many, many times, when I have not seen you, Little Dorrit?"

"Yes, I have been here sometimes when I have not come into the room."

"Very often?"

"Rather often," said Little Dorrit, timidly.

"Every day?"

"I think," said Little Dorrit, after hesitating, "that I have been here at least twice, every day."

He might have released the little light hand, after fervently kissing it again; but that, with a very gentle lingering where it was, it seemed to court being retained. He took it in both of his, and it lay softly on his breast.

"Dear Little Dorrit, it is not my imprisonment only that will soon be over. This sacrifice of you must be ended. We must learn to part again, and to take our different ways so wide asunder. You have not forgotten what we said together, when you came back?"

"O no, I have not forgotten it. But something has been—You feel quite strong to-day, don't you?"

"Quite strong."

The hand he held, crept up a little nearer to his face.

"Do you feel quite strong enough to know what a great fortune I have got?"

"I shall be very glad to be told. No fortune can be too great or good for Little Dorrit."

"I have been anxiously waiting to tell you. I have been longing and longing to tell you. You are sure you will not take it?"

"Never!"

"You are quite sure you will not take half of it?"

"Never, dear Little Dorrit?"

As she looked at him silently, there was something in her affectionate face that he did not quite comprehend; something that could have broken into tears in a moment, and yet that was happy and proud.

"You will be sorry to hear what I have to tell you about Fanny. Poor Fanny has lost everything. She has nothing left but her husband's income. All that papa gave her when she married, was lost as your money was lost. It was in the same hands, and it is all gone."

Arthur was more shocked than surprised to hear it. "I had hoped it might not be so bad," he said: "but I had feared a heavy loss there, knowing the connexion between her husband and the defaulter."

"Yes. It is all gone. I am very sorry for Fanny; very, very, very sorry for poor Fanny. My poor brother, too!"

"Had *he* property in the same hands?"

"Yes! And it is all gone.—How much do you think my own great fortune is?"

As Arthur looked at her enquiringly, with a new apprehension on him, she withdrew her hand, and laid her face down on the spot where it had rested.

"I have nothing in the world. I am as poor as when I lived here. When papa came over to England, he confided everything he had to the same hands, and it is all swept away. O my dearest and best, are you quite sure you will not share my fortune with me now?"

Locked in his arms, held to his heart, with his manly tears upon her own cheek, she drew the slight hand round his neck, and clasped it in its fellow-hand.

"Never to part, my dearest Arthur; never any more until the last! I never was rich before, I never was proud before, I never was happy before. I am rich in being taken by you, I am proud in having been resigned by you, I am happy in being with you in this prison, as I should be happy in coming back to it with you, if it should be the will of God, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth. I am yours anywhere, everywhere! I love you dearly! I would rather pass my life here with you, and go out daily, working for our bread, than I would have the greatest fortune that ever was told, and be the greatest lady that ever was honored. O, if poor papa may only know how blest at last my heart is, in this room where he suffered for so many years!"

Maggy had of course been staring from the first, and had of course been crying her eyes out, long before this. Maggy was now so overjoyed that, after hugging her little mother with all her might, she went down stairs like a clog-hornpipe to find somebody or other to whom to impart her gladness. Whom should Maggy meet but Flora and Mr. F's Aunt opportunely coming in? And whom else, as a consequence of that meeting, should Little Dorrit find waiting for herself, when, a good two or three hours afterwards, she went out?

Flora's eyes were a little red, and she seemed rather out of spirits. Mr. F's Aunt was so stiffened that she had the appearance of being past bending, by any means short of powerful mechanical pressure. Her bonnet was cocked up behind in a terrific manner; and her stony

reticule was as rigid as if it had been petrified by the Gorgon's head, and had got it at that moment inside. With these imposing attributes, Mr. F's Aunt, publicly seated on the steps of the Marshal's official residence, had been for the two or three hours in question a great boon to the younger inhabitants of the Borough, whose sallies of humour she had considerably flushed herself by resenting, at the point of her umbrella, from time to time.

"Painfully aware, Miss Dorrit, I am sure," said Flora, "that to propose an adjournment to any place to one so far removed by fortune and so courted and caressed by the best society must ever appear intruding even if not a pie-shop far below your present sphere and a back-parlor though a civil man but if for the sake of Arthur—cannot overcome it more improper now than over late Doyce and Clennam—one last remark I might wish to make one last explanation I might wish to offer perhaps your good nature might excuse under pretence of three kidney ones the humble place of conversation."

Rightly interpreting this rather obscure speech, Little Dorrit returned that she was quite at Flora's disposition. Flora accordingly led the way across the road to the pie-shop in question; Mr. F's Aunt stalking across in the rear, and putting herself in the way of being run over, with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.

When the "three kidney ones," which were to be a blind to the conversation, were set before them on three little tin platters, each kidney one ornamented with a hole at the top, into which the civil man poured hot gravy out of a spouted can as if he were feeding three lambs, Flora took out her pocket-handkerchief.

"If Fancy's fair dreams," she began, "have ever pictured that when Arthur—cannot overcome it pray excuse me—was restored to freedom even a pie as far from flaky as the present and so deficient in kidney as to be in that respect like a minced nutmeg might not prove unacceptable if offered by the hand of true regard such visions have for ever fled and all is cancelled but being aware that tenderer relations are in contemplation beg to state that I heartily wish well to both and find no fault with either not the least, it may be withering to know that ere the hand of Time had made me much less slim than formerly and dreadfully red on the slightest exertion particularly after eating I well know when it takes the form of a rash it might have been and was not through the interruption of parents and mental torpor succeeded until the mysterious clue was held by Mr. F still I would not be ungenerous to either and I heartily wish well to both."

Little Dorrit took her hand, and thanked her for all her old kindness.

"Call it not kindness," returned Flora, giving her an honest kiss, "for you always were the best and dearest little thing that ever was if I may take the liberty and even in a money point of view a saving being Conscience itself though I must add much more agreeable than mine ever was to me for though not I hope more burdened than other people's yet I have always found it far readier to make one uncomfortable than comfortable and evidently taking a greater pleasure in doing it but I am wandering, one hope I wish to express

ere yet the closing scene draws in and it is that I do trust for the sake of old times and old sincerity that Arthur will know that I didn't desert him in his misfortunes but that I came backwards and forwards constantly to ask if I could do anything for him and that I sat in the pie shop where they very civilly fetched something warm in a tumbler from the hotel and really very nice hours after hours to keep him company over the way without his knowing it."

Flora really had tears in her eyes now, and they showed her to great advantage.

"Over and above which," said Flora, "I earnestly beg you as the dearest thing that ever was if you'll still excuse the familiarity from one who moves in very different circles to let Arthur understand that I don't know after all whether it wasn't all nonsense between us though pleasant at the time and trying too and certainly Mr. F did work a change and the spell being broken nothing could be expected to take place without weaving it afresh which various circumstances have combined to prevent of which perhaps not the least powerful was that it was not to be, I am not prepared to say that if it had been agreeable to Arthur and had brought itself about naturally in the first instance I should not have been very glad being of a lively disposition and moped at home where papa undoubtedly is the most aggravating of his sex and not improved since having been cut down by the hand of the Incendiary into something of which I never saw the counterpart in all my life but jealousy is not my character nor ill-will though many faults."

Without having been able closely to follow Mrs. Finching through this labyrinth, Little Dorrit understood its purpose, and cordially accepted the trust.

"The withered chaplet my dear," said Flora, with great enjoyment, "is then perished the column is crumbled and the pyramid is standing upside down upon its what's-his-name call it not giddiness call it not weakness call it not folly I must now retire into privacy and look upon the ashes of departed joys no more but taking the further liberty of paying for the pastry which has formed the humble pretext of our interview will for ever say Adieu!"

Mr. F's Aunt, who had eaten her pie with great solemnity, and who had been elaborating some grievous scheme of injury in her mind, since her first assumption of that public position on the Marshal's steps, took the present opportunity of addressing the following Sibyllic apostrophe to the relict of her late nephew.

"Bring him for'ard, and I'll chuck him out o' winder!"

Flora tried in vain to soothe the excellent woman, by explaining that they were going home to dinner. Mr. F's Aunt persisted in replying, "Bring him for'ard, and I'll chuck him out o' winder!" Having reiterated this demand an immense number of times, with a sustained glare of defiance at Little Dorrit, Mr. F's Aunt folded her arms, and sat down in the corner of the pie-shop parlor; steadfastly refusing to budge until such time as "he" should have been "brought for'ard," and the chucking portion of his destiny accomplished.

In this condition of things, Flora confided to Little Dorrit that she had not seen Mr. F's Aunt so full of life and character for weeks;

that she would find it necessary to remain there "hours perhaps," until the inexorable old lady could be softened; and that she could manage her best alone. They parted, therefore, in the friendliest manner, and with the kindest feeling on both sides.

Mr. F's Aunt holding out like a grim fortress, and Flora becoming in need of refreshment, a messenger was dispatched to the hotel for the tumbler already glanced at, which was afterwards replenished. With the aid of its contents, a newspaper, and some skimming of the cream of the pie-stock, Flora got through the remainder of the day in perfect good humour; though occasionally embarrassed by the consequences of an idle rumour which circulated among the credulous infants of the neighbourhood, to the effect that an old lady had sold herself to the pie-shop, to be made up, and was then sitting in the pie-shop parlor, declining to complete her contract. This attracted so many young persons of both sexes, and, when the shades of evening began to fall, occasioned so much interruption to the business, that the merchant became very pressing in his proposals that Mr. F's Aunt should be removed. A conveyance was accordingly brought to the door, which, by the joint efforts of the merchant and Flora, this remarkable woman was at last induced to enter; though not without even then putting her head out of the window, and demanding to have him "brought for'ard" for the purpose originally mentioned. As she was observed at this time to direct baleful glances towards the Marshalsea, it has been supposed that this admirably consistent female intended by "him," Arthur Clennam. This, however, is mere speculation; who the person was, who, for the satisfaction of Mr. F's Aunt's mind, ought to have been brought forward, and never was brought forward, will never be positively known.

The autumn days went on, and Little Dorrit never came to the Marshalsea now, and went away without seeing him. No, no, no.

One morning, as Arthur listened for the light feet, that every morning ascended winged to his heart, bringing the heavenly brightness of a new love into the room where the old love had wrought so hard and been so true; one morning, as he listened, he heard her coming, not alone.

"Dear Arthur," said her delighted voice outside the door, "I have some one here. May I bring some one in?"

He had thought from the tread there were two with her. He answered "Yes," and she came in with Mr. Meagles. Sunbrowned and jolly Mr. Meagles looked, and he opened his arms and folded Arthur in them, like a sunbrowned and jolly father.

"Now, I am all right," said Mr. Meagles, after a minute or so. "Now, it's over. Arthur, my dear fellow, confess at once that you expected me before."

"I did," said Arthur; "but Amy told me——"

"Little Dorrit. Never any other name." (It was she who whispered it).

"—But my Little Dorrit told me that, without asking for any further explanation, I was not to expect you until I saw you."

"And now you see me, my boy," said Mr. Meagles, shaking him

by the hand stoutly; "and now you shall have any explanation and every explanation. The fact is, I *was* here,—came straight to you from the Allongers and Marshongers, or I should be ashamed to look you in the face this day,—but you were not in company trim at the moment, and I had to start off again to catch Doyce."

"Poor Doyce!" sighed Arthur.

"Don't call him names that he don't deserve," said Mr. Meagles. "*He's* not poor; *he's* doing well enough. Doyce is a wonderful fellow over there. I assure you, he is making out his case like a house a-fire. He has fallen on his legs, has Dan. Where they don't want things done and find a man to do 'em, that man's off his legs; but where they do want things done and find a man to do 'em, that man's on his legs. You won't have occasion to trouble the Circumlocution Office any more. Let me tell you, Dan has done without 'em!"

"What a load you take from my mind!" cried Arthur. "What happiness you give me!"

"Happiness?" retorted Mr. Meagles. "Don't talk about happiness till you see Dan. I assure you, Dan is directing works and executing labors over yonder, that it would make your hair stand on end to look at. He's no public offender, bless you, now! He's medalled and ribboned, and starred and crossed, and I don't-know-what all'd, like a born nobleman. But we mustn't talk about that over here."

"Why not?"

"Oh, egad!" said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head very seriously, "he must hide all those things under lock and key when he comes over here. They won't do, over here. In that particular, Britannia is a Britannia in the Manger—won't give her children such distinctions herself, and won't allow them to be seen, when they're given by other countries. No, no, Dan!" said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head again. "That won't do here!"

"If you had brought me (except for Doyce's sake) twice what I have lost," cried Arthur, "you would not have given me the pleasure that you give me in this news."

"Why, of course, of course," assented Mr. Meagles. "Of course I know that, my good fellow, and therefore I come out with it in the first burst. Now, to go back, about catching Doyce. I caught Doyce. Ran against him, among a lot of those dirty brown dogs in women's nightcaps a great deal too big for 'em, calling themselves Arabs and all sorts of incoherent races. You know 'em! Well! He was coming straight to me, and I was going straight to him, and so we came back together."

"Doyce in England?" exclaimed Arthur.

"There!" said Mr. Meagles, throwing open his arms. "I am the worst man in the world to manage a thing of this sort. I don't know what I should have done if I had been in the diplomatic line—right, perhaps! The long and the short of it is, Arthur, we have both been in England this fortnight. And if you go on to ask where Doyce is at the present moment, why, my plain answer is—here he is! And now I can breathe again, at last!"

Doyce darted in from behind the door, caught Arthur by both hands, and said the rest for himself.

"There are only three branches of my subject, my dear Clennam," said Doyce, proceeding to mould them severally, with his plastic thumb on the palm of his hand, "and they're soon disposed of. First, not a word more from you about the past. There was an error in your calculations. I know what that is. It affects the whole machine, and failure is the consequence. You will profit by the failure, and will avoid it another time. I have done a similar thing myself, in construction, often. Every failure teaches a man something, if he will learn; and you are too sensible a man not to learn from this failure. So much for firstly. Secondly. I was sorry you should have taken it so heavily to heart, and reproached yourself so severely; I was travelling home night and day to put matters right, with the assistance of our friend, when I fell in with our friend as he has informed you. Thirdly. We two agreed, that, after what you had undergone, after your distress of mind, and after your illness, it would be a pleasant surprise if we could so far keep quiet as to get things perfectly arranged without your knowledge, and then come and say that all the affairs were smooth, that everything was right, that the business stood in greater want of you than it ever did, and that a new and prosperous career was opened before you and me as partners. That's thirdly. But you know we always make an allowance for friction, and so I have reserved space to close in. My dear Clennam, I thoroughly confide in you; you have it in your power to be quite as useful to me, as I have, or have had, it in my power to be useful to you; your old place awaits you, and wants you very much; there is nothing to detain you here, one half-hour longer."

There was a silence, which was not broken until Arthur had stood for some time at the window with his back towards them, and until his little wife that was to be, had gone to him and stayed by him.

"I made a remark a while ago," said Daniel Doyce then, "which I am inclined to think was an incorrect one. I said there was nothing to detain you here, Clennam, half an hour longer. Am I mistaken in supposing that you would rather not leave here till to-morrow morning? Do I know, without being very wise, where you would like to go, direct, from these walls and from this room?"

"You do," returned Arthur. "It has been our cherished purpose."

"Very well!" said Doyce. "Then, if this young lady will do me the honor of regarding me for four and twenty hours in the light of a father, and will take a ride with me now towards Saint Paul's Church-yard, I dare say I know what we want to get there."

Little Dorrit and he went out together soon afterwards, and Mr. Meagles lingered behind to say a word to his friend.

"I think, Arthur, you will not want Mother and me in the morning, and we will keep away. It might set Mother thinking about Pet; she's a soft-hearted woman. She's best at the cottage, and I'll stay there and keep her company."

With that they parted for the time. And the day ended, and the night ended, and the morning came, and Little Dorrit, simply dressed

as usual, and having no one with her but Maggy, came into the prison with the sunshine. The poor room was a happy room that morning. Where in the world was there a room so full of quiet joy!

"My dear love," said Arthur. "Why does Maggy light the fire? We shall be gone directly."

"I asked her to do it. I have taken such an odd fancy. I want you to burn something for me."

"What?"

"Only this folded paper. If you will put it in the fire with your own hand, just as it is, my fancy will be gratified."

"Superstitious, darling Little Dorrit? Is it a charm?"

"It is any thing you like best, my own," she answered, laughing with glistening eyes and standing on tiptoe to kiss him, "if you will only humour me when the fire burns up."

So they stood before the fire, waiting: Clennam with his arm about her waist, and the fire shining, as fire in that same place had often shone, in Little Dorrit's eyes. "Is it bright enough now?" said Arthur. "Quite bright enough now," said Little Dorrit. "Does the charm want any words to be said?" asked Arthur, as he held the paper over the flame. "You can say (if you don't mind) 'I love you!'" answered Little Dorrit. So he said it, and the paper burned away.

They passed very quietly along the yard; for, no one was there, though many heads were stealthily peeping from the windows. Only one face, familiar of old, was in the Lodge. When they had both accosted it, and spoken many kind words, Little Dorrit turned back one last time with her hand stretched out, saying, "Good bye, good John! I hope you will live very happy, dear!"

Then they went up the steps of the neighbouring Saint George's Church, and went up to the altar, where Daniel Doyce was waiting in his paternal character. And there, was Little Dorrit's old friend who had given her the Burial Register for a pillow: full of admiration that she should come back to them to be married, after all.

And they were married, with the sun shining on them through the painted figure of Our Saviour on the window. And they went into the very room where Little Dorrit had slumbered after her party, to sign the Marriage Register. And there, Mr. Pancks (destined to be chief clerk to Doyce and Clennam, and afterwards partner in the house), sinking the Incendiary in the peaceful friend, looked in at the door to see it done, with Flora gallantly supported on one arm and Maggy on the other, and a back ground of John Chivery and father, and other turnkeys, who had run round for the moment, deserting the parent Marshalsea for its happy child. Nor had Flora the least signs of seclusion upon her, notwithstanding her recent declaration; but, on the contrary was wonderfully smart, and enjoyed the ceremonies mightily, though in a fluttered way.

Little Dorrit's old friend held the inkstand as she signed her name, and the clerk paused in taking off the good clergyman's surplice, and all the witnesses looked on with special interest. "For, you see," said Little Dorrit's old friend, "this young lady is one of our curiosities, and has come now to the third volume of our Registers. Her

birth is in what I call the first volume ; she lay asleep on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume ; and she's now a-writing her little name as a bride, in what I call the third volume."

They all gave place when the signing was done, and Little Dorrit and her husband walked out of the church alone. They paused for a moment on the steps of the portico, looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays, and then went down.

Went down into a modest life of usefulness and happiness. Went down to give a mother's care, in the fulness of time, to Fanny's neglected children no less than to their own, and to leave that lady going into Society for ever and a day. Went down to give a tender nurse and friend to Tip for some few years, who was never vexed by the great exactions he made of her, in return for the riches he might have given her if he had ever had them, and who lovingly closed his eyes upon the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits. They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed ; and as they passed along in sunshine and in shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar.

THE END.

LITTLE DORRIT.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. K. BROWNE.

LONDON:

BRADBURY AND EVANS, 11, BOUVERIE STREET.

1857.

WILLIAM DOBELL

1850

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DEDICATED

TO

CLARKSON STANFIELD, R.A.,

BY HIS ATTACHED FRIEND.



PREFACE.

I HAVE been occupied with this story, during many working hours of two years. I must have been very ill employed, if I could not leave its merits and demerits as a whole, to express themselves on its being read as a whole. But, as it is not unreasonable to suppose that I may have held its various threads with a more continuous attention than any one else can have given to them during its desultory publication, it is not unreasonable to ask that the weaving may be looked at in its completed state, and with the pattern finished.

If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done that violence to good manners, in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Enquiry at Chelsea. If I might make so bold as to defend that extravagant conception, Mr. Merdle, I would hint that it originated after the Railroad-share epoch, in the times of a certain Irish bank, and of one or two other equally

laudable enterprises. If I were to plead anything in mitigation of the preposterous fancy that a bad design will sometimes claim to be a good and an expressly religious design, it would be the curious coincidence that it has been brought to its climax in these pages, in the days of the public examination of late Directors of a Royal British Bank. But, I submit myself to suffer judgment to go by default on all these counts, if need be, and to accept the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like them was ever known in this land.

Some of my readers may have an interest in being informed whether or no any portions of the Marshalsea Prison are yet standing. I did not know, myself, until the sixth of this present month, when I went to look. I found the outer front courtyard, often mentioned in this story, metamorphosed into a butter-shop; and I then almost gave up every brick of the jail for lost. Wandering, however, down a certain adjacent "Angel Court, leading to Bermondsey," I came to "Marshalsea Place:" the houses in which I recognised, not only as the great block of the former prison, but as preserving the rooms that arose in my mind's-eye when I became Little Dorrit's biographer. The smallest boy I ever conversed with, carrying the largest baby I ever saw, offered a supernaturally intelligent explanation of the locality in its old uses, and was very nearly correct. How this young Newton (for such I judge him to be) came by his information, I don't know; he was a quarter of a century too young to know anything about it of himself. I pointed to the window of the room where Little Dorrit was born, and where her father lived so long, and asked him what was the name of the lodger who tenanted that apartment at present? He said "Tom Pythick."

I asked him who was Tom Pythick? and he said, "Joe Pythick's uncle."

A little further on, I found the older and smaller wall, which used to enclose the pent-up inner prison where nobody was put, except for ceremony. But, whosoever goes into Marshalsea Place, turning out of Angel Court, leading to Bermondsey, will find his feet on the very paving-stones of the extinct Marshalsea jail; will see its narrow yard to the right and to the left, very little altered if at all, except that the walls were lowered when the place got free; will look upon the rooms in which the debtors lived; and will stand among the crowding ghosts of many miserable years.

In the Preface to *Bleak House* I remarked that I had never had so many readers. In the Preface to its next successor, *Little Dorrit*, I have still to repeat the same words. Deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us, I add to this Preface, as I added to that, May we meet again!

LONDON,

May, 1857.

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ERRATA.



Page 317, line 27 from the top of page, *for* "William" *read* "Frederick."

In chapter xvii. of the second book, beginning at page 467, and ending at page 474, *for* "Rigaud" *read* "Blandois," as often as the name Rigaud occurs.



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The Premiums of Nine Offices enumerated are stated to be £824,924
Of which the Royal alone amount to..... 371,957
being 82 per cent. of the accumulated Premiums of the remaining Eight Companies.

EXPENDITURE.

The expenditure of Insurance Companies is, at present, attracting the anxious attention of the Public. The statement of "The Times" has elicited the following remarks from a contemporary:—"Here, again, the Royal Insurance Company occupies a position of honourable pre-eminence; for while its expenses of management, spread over a period of three years, have been less than 20 per cent., those of five other offices, extending over an equal time—for we omit those which have been established within three years, or we might make a much stronger case—have varied from 22 to 74 per cent., and in one case have been as high as 111 per cent. on the receipts.

RESOURCES.

In like manner, the entire Funds in hand of thirteen offices is quoted, in "The Times," at £1,233,688, including the Royal, which alone is £372,394, and which is, therefore, equal to 43 per Cent. of the accumulated funds of the remaining twelve offices; or, to make the VAST RESOURCES of the Company still more manifest, it may be stated that, putting aside the three largest offices named, (the funds of the greatest of which barely exceed one-half of those of the "Royal") the united funds of the remaining ten offices do not equal the funds of this Company.

The favourable position in which this Company is placed in "The Times" article, would have been even more prominently shown if the experience of other years than those taken had been selected.

As an instance, the following is the result taken from the accounts of the Company for the year 1855:—

Fire Premiums and other Receipts, not including Life.....	£149,612 13 7
Losses, Expenses, and Dividend.....	131,684 13 8
Balance as a Reserve from one year's transactions alone	18,127 19 11
Funds in hand, without including ample Reserve for Life Liabilities...Upwards of	£400,000 0 0

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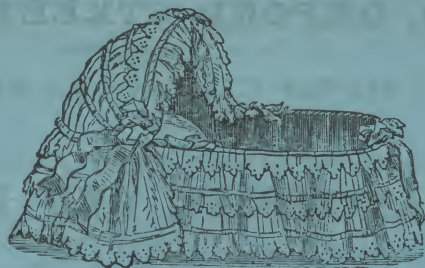
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